THE MADIGANS

A Few of Irene's "Fathers"

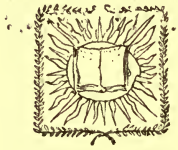
THE MADIGANS

BY

MIRIAM MICHELSON

AUTHOR OF "IN THE BISHOP'S CARRIAGE"

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
BY ORSON LOWELL



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THE MADIGANS

THE MADIGANS

CECILIA THE PHARISEE

I, Cecilia Morgan Madigan, being of sound mind and in purfect bodily health, and residing in Virginia City, Nevada, do hereby on this first day of April solemnly promise:

1. That I will be Number 1 this next month at school.

2. That I will be pachient with Papa, and try to stand him.

3. That I will set Bep—yes, and Fom too, even if she is Irene's partner—a good example.

4. That I will not once this next month pinch Aunt Anne's sensative plant—no matter what she does to me.

5. That I will dust the back legs of the piano even when Mrs. Pemberton is n't expected.

6. That I will help Kate controll her temper, and not mock and aggravate her when she sulks.

7. That I will be a little mother to Frank and teach her to grow up and be a creddit to the famly.

8. That I will not steal candy out of Kate's

pocket—without first begging her very hard to give me some.

9. That I will practice The Gazelle fathfully every solatary day. And give up reading on the sly while I play 5-finger exercises.

10. That I will try to bear with Irene. That I will do all I can not to fight with her—but she is a selfish devvil who is always in the wrong.

And all this I solemnly promise myself without being coersed in any way, of my own free will, without let or hidrance, because I want to be good.

Cecilia Morgan Madigan (called Sissy),
Aged 11 last birthday.

P.S. And I feel sure I can do it all, God helping me, except Number 10—which is the hardest.

SISSY, who had been sitting writing only half dressed, folded the paper reverently, put it to her lips for lack of a seal, and then buttoned it firmly inside her corset waist.

She felt so virtuous already that the carrying out of her intentions seemed really supererogatory. When she went to Irene to have her button her dress in the back, she had such a sensation of holiness, such a consciousness of a forbearing, pure, and gentle spirit, that her sis-

ter's malicious pretense of ignoring her presence appeared to her nothing less than sacrilege.

"Ain't you going to button me, Split?" she demanded, indignant that her enemy, whom she was going to treat with Christ-like charity, should successfully try her temper before the ink was dry on her own promise to keep the peace.

"Ask me pretty," grinned Split, whose nickname honored a gymnastic feat which no other Madigan, however athletic, could accomplish half so successfully as the second. "Say 'please.' "

"I won't do anything of the sort. You know you 've got to do it, and you 've no right to expect me to say 'please' every time. You don't do it yourself, you hateful thing!"

"Why don't you cry?"

"Because I won't for you—because you can't make me—because—"

"Because you are crying in spite of yourself! Because anybody can make you cry, cry-baby!"

Sissy's hands flew up to her breast. It was a recognized gesture with her, a physical holding of herself together in the last minute that preceded her temperamental flying to pieces.

Split retreated cautiously, clearing the deck herself for action.

But no first gun was fired in that engagement. A crackling of the document hidden over the spot where she thought her heart was came like a warning note to Sissy. She struggled against it a moment; then her hands fell. Meekly she turned her back upon her tormentor, and in a voice of such exquisite holiness as to be almost unearthly, she said:

"Split dear, will you please button me?"

A look of outraged astonishment at the unheard-of endearment came over Irene's face. The Madigans regarded demonstrative affection as pure affectation at its best; at its worst it was little short of indecent.

"'Split dear?'" mocked Irene as soon as she recovered. "Yes, dear. Turn around, dear. Stand straight, dear. Wait a minute, dear—"

Sissy stood in silence, biting her tongue that she might not speak. She was so occupied with the desire to keep Number 10 of her compact with herself that she did not notice how long it was before Irene really began to button her waist. She did note, though, that she began at the bottom, a proceeding Split fancied merely because it drove her junior nearly frantic. She buttoned with maddening slowness up to the middle, when she capriciously left this point and recommenced at the top.

"'That settles Number 10,' said Sissy, grimly"

Mentally Sissy followed the operation. It was almost complete when through the little gap purposely left open Split deftly introduced a providentially flattened piece of ice from the window-sill, giving her victim a little shake that sent the ice slipping smoothly down her squirming body, but escaping before Sissy could turn and rend her.

"That settles Number 10," said Sissy, grimly, to herself, while she danced with discomfort. "I 'll kill her if I get a chance—that 's what I 'll do. I 'll get even, or my name 's not Sis Madigan."

She hurried back into her room, which the twins shared, and stood in damp martyrdom while Bessie's butter-fingers crept with miserable slowness up and down. She suffered so from Bessie's ineptness that, despite the requirements of Number 3 of her code, she tore herself violently from her and turned her back imploringly to Florence. But Fom was a partizan of Split's, and it was against all the ethics of Madigan warfare to aid and comfort the enemy. When Sissy, chastened, returned to Bep's ministrations, the blonde one of the twins was so hurt and offended by the implication of awkwardness—a point upon which she was as vulnerable as she was sensitive—that Sissy

slapped them both before she went at last for relief to Aunt Anne.

This was fatal, as she knew it would be.

"I shall tell your father about Irene," her aunt said, looking up from the coffee she was sipping as she lay in bed reading a French book. "But it 's just as well, for I told you yesterday that that dress was too dirty to wear another day. Change it now—"

"Oh, Aunt Anne, it 's late already—"

"You 'll change that dress, Sissy, or you won't go to school."

"I won't! It 's too late. I 'll be late. That means one credit off, and this month I 'm going—" A remembrance of her lofty intentions came suddenly to Sissy. All the world seemed bent on compelling her to forswear herself.

"Cecilia!" commanded Miss Madigan.

Sissy stiffened.

"You 've disturbed my reading enough this morning. If you say another word I 'll—"

"Oh, Aunt Anne—"

"Go over to the wall, Cecilia, and stand with your back to me for five minutes."

With a fiendish light in her eye—a light of such desperate satisfaction as betokened one gladly driven to commit the unforgivable—

Sissy moved toward the sensitive-plant in the window.

"Not there! That poor plant seems to suffer sympathetically with your badness. Stand over by the bureau."

Sissy obeyed. Her rage at being made ridiculous, her sense of outrage that a perfectionist like herself should suffer punishment, added to her knowledge of the flight of time on school mornings, strangled her into dumbness. But she clasped the paper in her breast as a drowning man might a spar from the wreck. At least Number 4 was intact. She had been mercifully spared the fracture of this one of her self-made commandments.

She was standing with her nose pressed firmly against the green wall-paper, her back laid open as by a surgical operation, and a towel, which her aunt had forced into the aperture for drying purposes, dangling down behind, when Kate, passing the door on her way to breakfast, glanced in.

Her sputtering, quickly stifled screech of laughter sent Sissy spinning about as a bull does when the banderilla is planted in his quivering flesh. She looked at the doorway; it was empty, but she heard scurrying footsteps without. Kate was on her way to tell the others.

She looked at Aunt Anne. That severe lady had dropped her book and, seized by the contagion, was shaking with silent laughter.

Not a word did Sissy say. Her expression of disgust,—disgust that a grown-up should be so silly as to see something funny in absolutely nothing; disgust that her aunt should so weaken the effect of her own discipline,—reinforced by the green smudge on her nose, rubbed off the wall-paper, finished Miss Madigan. The lady no longer attempted to conceal the disgraceful fact that she was laughing. She gave an audible gurgle, and began to wipe the tears of enjoyment from her eyes.

In that moment the iron entered into Sissy Madigan's soul. She turned again to the wall, and taking a pin which had fastened the bow of ribbon at her throat, she pricked slowly but relentlessly in the loose wall-paper this legend:

AUNT ANNE—PIG

After which she felt relieved, and, the five minutes being up, left the room with such uncompromising hauteur, still splashed with green on the nose, still split open down the back, with the towel's fringe dangling in dignity behind, that her aunt again exploded.

"Left the room with such uncompromising hauteur . . . that her aunt again exploded"

The fact that she had irretrievably lost one credit through tardiness set Sissy's lips in a tight line of determination to guard jealously every one of the ninety-and-nine left to her.

At recess she remained at her desk studying her geography with an intensity of purpose that made her rivals' hearts quake. She sat at the teacher's desk—lifted to this almost regal eminence by his fondness for her petulant ways as well as because of that quality of leadership which made Sissy her fellows' spokeswoman. Hers was the privilege of using the master's pencils, sharpened to a fineness that made neatness a dissipation instead of a task. It was she, of course, who originated the decorative style of arithmetic-paper much in vogue, on which each example was penned off in an inclosure fenced by alternating vertical and horizontal double hyphens.

But a queer, conscientious sense of the responsibilities of power and place modified Sissy's rapturous delight in her position, so that she kept it despite a fiercely jealous class-spirit developed by a strict credit-system, by the emulative temper which the rarefied atmosphere of the little mining town fostered, and by a young master just out of college who looked upon his teaching as a temporary adventure,

much as a Japanese gentleman regards domestic service.

It was in her capacity of class representative that the master had consulted Sissy upon the limits to be observed in the forthcoming public oral examination in geography. And she had enlightened him as to what would be considered quite "fair." This treaty, into which she entered with the seriousness of an ambassador to an unfriendly power arranging a settlement of a disputed question, had a character so sacred in her eyes that its violation by the master in the course of the afternoon came upon her like a blow.

"Cecilia Madigan," asked the master, "what is the highest mountain in the world?"

Sissy rose. The imposing array of visitors in school faded out of her horizon. All she could see was the eyes of her schoolmates turned in accusatory horror upon her. They suspected her of betraying them; of using her elevated position to hand down untrustworthy information.

"Please, Mr. Garvan," she said in tones more of sorrow than of anger, skilfully showing her knowledge of the answer while denying his right to it, "that question is n't on the map of Africa."

"'Please, Mr. Garvan,' she said"

A flush of annoyance mounted to the young master's forehead. Out of the corner of her eye Sissy saw the preliminary twitch of the corners of his lips that served the class for a danger-signal.

"What is the highest mountain, Cecilia?" he repeated sternly.

Sissy stood a moment looking at him. All that she might not say—her contempt for pledge-breakers, her shocked hero-worship now forever a thing of the past, her outraged schoolgirl's affection—she shot straight at the master from her angry eyes.

Then she sat down.

"I don't know," she said.

He looked up from his book, incredulous. Ten credits out of one hundred gone at one fell swoop—ten of Sissy Madigan's credits, for which she fought so gallantly and which she cherished so jealously when she once had them in her possession.

"I—don't—know," repeated Sissy, disdainfully.

The master passed the question. But as he put it to the next girl, Sissy put another question, with her eyes, to the same girl.

"Are you a scab?" her steady gaze challenged. "Are you going to benefit by what a

mate suffers for principle's sake? Are you a coward who does n't dare to stand up for your class? And—do you know what you 'll get from me if you are?''

''I—don't—know,'' faltered the girl.

A glory of triumph shot over Sissy's face. It leaped like a sunrise from peak to peak in a mountain-range of obstinacy. ''I don't know'' —''I don't know''—''I don't know''—the shibboleth of the strikers' cause went down the line. The master was shamed in public by the banner pupils of his school. He writhed, but he put the question steadily to every girl till he came to Irene, last in the line.

''What is the highest mountain in the world?'' he asked, perfunctorily now.

But, to his amazement, she rose, and, looking out of the window up to the mountain to the skirts of which the town clung, she answered:

''Mount Davidson.''

Sissy's savage joy followed so quickly upon her horror at her own sister's defection that the closing of school left her in a trembling storm of emotions. In the dressing-room, where the girls were putting on their hats, she marched up to Irene, followed by her wrathful adherents and feeling like an avenging Brutus.

''You 're a sneak, Split Madigan! You 're

a coward, and—and a stupid coward. You don't know enough to betray your class and get the benefit of it, but you 'd rather be mean than get credits, anyway. Nobody can count on you. Changeable Silk, that 's what you are—changing color all the time, never standing firm! I hate you! Changeable Silk! Changeable Silk!"

"Changeable Silk! Changeable Silk!" chanted her following.

The little dressing-room rang with the cry of the mob, so filled with significance by the tone in which it was uttered that Irene paled and shrank.

But only for a moment. The Madigans never lacked courage long. That fierce internecine strife waged by the clan in the old house high on the side of the hill made a Madigan quick and resolute.

"Stupid yourself, Sissy! My answer made him madder than your not answering."

Sissy looked at her searchingly. "But—did you—" she wavered.

"Of course I did! Who 's the stupid now? Do you s'pose I did n't know it was—"

"What?—what?" Sissy repeated as her sister hesitated.

Irene turned up her nose insultingly. "I—

don't—know,'' she mocked, and beat a successful retreat.

Francis Madigan dined in a long room, the only man at a table with seven women ranging in years from four to forty-four. The accumulation of girls in his family was so wanton an outrage upon his desires that he rather rejoiced in the completeness of the infliction as an undeniable grievance.

He needed a grievance as a shield against which others' grievances might be shattered. And in default of a more tangible one, he cited his heavily be-daughtered house. It was at dinner-time that he always seemed to realize the extent of his disaster. As he took his place at the head, his wrathful eye swept from Frances in her high chair, up along the line, past the twins, through Cecilia, Irene, and Kate, till it lighted upon Miss Madigan's good-humored, placid face. His sister's placidity was an ever-present offense to the father of the Madigans, —the most irascible of unsuccessful men,—and the snort with which he finished the inspection and took up the carving-knife had become a classic in Madigan annals long before Sissy brought down the house at the age of eight by imitating it one evening in his absence.

"Some of the Madigans"

But to-night a most painful and ostentatious respect marked Sissy's manner to her parent. She stood markedly,—while the others scrambled into their chairs and Wong, the Chinese servant, sped about placing everything on the table at once,—waiting for her father to be seated.

She was still waiting politely when his eye lighted upon her. "Sit down, Cecilia!" he roared; "what d' ye want, gaping there?"

Sissy sat down. So holy was she that she did not resent (openly) the low, delighted giggle Irene gave. She began to be politely attentive to Dusie, her father's pet canary, though she loathed the spoiled little thing that hopped about the table helping itself.

Madigan had a way of telling himself, in his rare moments of introspection, that the tenderness he might have lavished upon a son he spent upon the male offspring of more fortunate genera than man. The big Newfoundland and the great cat came to meals regularly. They shared Madigan's affection with the birds (whose cage, big as a dog's house, he had himself nailed up against the side of the wall), that broke into a maddening din of song, excited by the rival clatter of young Madigans dining.

Protected by this shrill symphony from the

sound of his daughters' voices, Madigan fed his dog, his cat, and his favorite canary, and with his head upon one hand, in token of his abiding disgust with the human, daughterful world, ate quickly with the other.

This pose was the signal that freed the feminine Madigan tongue. Usually they all broke into conversation at once; but on this evening there seemed to be some agreement which held them mute till Irene spoke.

"I am glad to see you be so patient with papa, Sissy," she said gently.

His third daughter glanced apprehensively at Madigan. But her father had retired within his shell, and nothing but a cataclysm could reach him there.

"Why—" she said, puzzled, "why—I—"

"Promise me that you 'll try to stand him," urged Split, joyously.

"And that you 'll help me control my temper, and not mock and aggravate me when I sulk," chanted Kate.

Sissy dropped her knife and fork, and her hands flew to her bosom, not in wrath, but in terror. The crackling testament was gone!

"Split! You—"

"Try to bear with me, won't you, Sis, even if I am a devil?" grinned Split.

"And set us a good example, Sissy," piped the twins.

Sissy gasped.

"Be a yittle muvver to Fwank," lisped the baby, prompted by a big sister.

"And don't steal candy out of my pocket, will you, Cecilia Morgan?" begged her oldest sister.

"And—"

Sissy sprang into the air, as though lifted bodily by the taunts of these ungrateful beneficiaries of her good intentions.

"Sit down, you ox!" came in thundering tones from the head of the table.

When one was called an ox among the Madigans the culprit invariably subsided, however the epithet might tend to make her sisters rejoice. But Sissy had borne too much in that one day—always keeping in mind the perfect sanctity with which she had begun it.

With an inarticulate explanation that was at once a sob, a complaint, and a trembling defiance, she pushed back her chair and fled to her room. Here she sobbed in peace and plenty; sobbed till tears became a luxury to be produced by a conscious effort of the will. It had always been a grief to Sissy that she could never cry enough. Split, now, could weep

vocally and by the hour, but all too soon for Sissy the wells of her own sorrow ran dry.

Yet tears had ever a chastening effect upon the third of the Madigans. In due time she rose, washed her face, and combed back her hair and braided it in a tight plait that stuck out at an aggressive angle on the side; unaided she could never get it to depend properly from the middle. This heightened the feeling of utter peacefulness, of remorse washed clean, besides putting her upon such a spiritual elevation as enabled her to meet her world with composure, though bitter experience told her how long a joke lasted among the Madigans.

She fell upon her knees at last beside her bed. No Madigan of this generation had been taught to pray, an aggressive skepticism—the tangent of excessive youthful religiosity—having made the girls' father an outspoken foe to religious exercise. But to Sissy's emotional, self-conscious soul the necessity for worded prayer came quick now and imperative.

"O Lord," she pleaded aloud, "help me to keep 'em all—even Number 10—in spite of Split and the devil. Help—"

She heard the door open behind her.

With a bound she was in bed, fully dressed as she was; and pulling the covers tight up to

"The Rest of the Madigans"

her neck, she waited, to all intents and purposes fast asleep.

"You little fool!" said Madigan, with a hint of laughter in his heavy voice and laying a not ungentle hand on her blazing cheeks. "D 'ye think I care if you want to kneel and kotow like other idiots? If you 're that kind—and I suppose you are, being a woman—pray and be—blessed!"

It was the nearest thing to a paternal benediction that had ever come to Sissy, but she was too wary a small actress to be moved by it out of her rôle. Nor did her father wait to note the effect of his words. His heavy step passed on and out of her room into his own, and the door slammed between them.

In a moment Sissy was up; in another moment she had torn off her clothes, blown out her candle, and jumped back into bed. She was almost asleep when the twins came in, but she feigned the deepest of slumbers when Bessie pushed a crackling piece of paper under her pillow, though her fingers closed greedily about it as soon as the room was quiet again.

She knew what it was—her precious compact with herself, that loyal little Bep had recaptured from the enemy. She lay there, lulled by its presence; and slowly, slowly she was drop-

ping off into real slumber when a sharply agonizing thought, an inescapable mental pin-prick, roused her. It was Number 9. She had not touched the piano during the whole of that strenuous day.

She withdrew her fingers reproachfully from the insistent reminder of virtuous intention, and resolutely she turned her back on it and tried to pretend herself to sleep. But every broken section of her treaty had a voice, and above them all clamored the call of Number 9 that it was not yet too late.

When Sissy rose wearily at last and draped the Mexican quilt about her, the house was quiet. All youthful Madigans were abed, and the older ones were in secure seclusion.

It was a small Saint Cecilia, with a short, stiff braid standing out from one side of her head, and utterly without musical enthusiasm, that sat down in the darkness at the old square piano. "La Gazelle" was out of the question, for she had no lamp and she did not yet know the trills and runs of her new "piece" by heart. But the five-finger exercises and the scales that it had been her custom to run over slightingly while she read from a paper novel by the Duchess open in front of her music—this much of an atonement was still within her power.

With her bare foot on the soft pedal, that none might hear her, Sissy played. It was dark and very quiet; the hush-hush of the throbbing mines filled the night and stilled it. At times her heart stood still for fear that she might be discovered; at other times the longing for a sensational uncovering of her belated and extraordinary goodness seized her, and her naked foot slipped from the cold pedal only to be hurriedly replaced before the jangle of the keys could escape.

How long she practised, and whether she redeemed herself and Number 9, Sissy never knew, for she fell asleep at last over the keys and was waked by a hoarse scream and a wild cry of "De debbil! De debbil!"

It was Wong, the Chinaman, who had but one name for all things supernatural. Coming home from Chinatown, he was passing the glass door near which the piano stood when he saw the slender figure in its trailing white drapery bowed over the keys.

Sissy looked up, sleep still bewildering her, and yet awake enough to be fearful of consequences. She tore open the door and sped after the Chinaman to enlighten him, but her pursuit only confirmed Wong's conception of that mission of malice which is devil's work on

earth. A terrified howl burst from him. There was only one being on earth of whom he stood in greater awe than the thing he fancied he was fleeing from; that one, logically, must be greater than It. Taking his very life in his hand, he doubled, darted past the shivering Thing, flew on through the open door, and made straight for the master's room.

For Sissy there was nothing to do but to follow.

"I wanted to be good," she wailed, unnerved, when Aunt Anne had her by the shoulder and was catechizing her in the presence of a nightgowned multitude of excited Madigans.

But succor came from an unexpected quarter. "Let the child alone, Anne," growled Madigan, adjusting the segment of the leg of woolen underwear which he wore for a nightcap; and seizing Sissy in his arms, he bore her off to bed.

"Papa's pet! Papa's baby!" mouthed Irene, under her breath, as she danced tauntingly along behind his back.

And Sissy, outraged in all the dignity of her eleven years at being carried like a child, but unspeakably happy in her father's favor, looked over his shoulder with a sheepish, smiling,

"Seizing Sissy in his arms, he bore her off to bed"

sleepy face, murmuring, "Sour grapes, Split, sour grapes!"

Afterward, encouraged by the darkness and the strangeness of being laid in bed from her father's arms, Sissy held him a moment by her side.

"When men make promises on paper that they can't keep, father," she whispered, "what do they do?"

"Oh, go to sleep, child! They become bankrupt, I suppose."

"And—and what becomes of the paper?"

"What do you know or care about such things? Will you go to sleep to-night?"

"If you had any bankrupt's paper," she pleaded, catching hold of his hand as he turned to leave her, "what would you do with it—please, father!"

"Why, tear it up, you goose."

With a jump, Sissy was bolt upright in bed and holding up a fluttering, much-folded sheet, an almost incredulous joy in her eager voice.

"Take mine and pretend I was bankrupt—please—oh, please!"

To Madigan all children, his own particularly, were such unaccountable beings that a vagary more or less could not more hopelessly perplex his misunderstanding of them. With

a "Tut! tut!" of impatience, he took the paper from her and tore it twice across.

A long sigh of relief came from Sissy as the bits fluttered to the floor. "You 're such a nice father!" she murmured happily, and fell asleep, a blissful bankrupt instead of a Pharisee.

A PAGAN AND A PURITAN

A PAGAN AND A PURITAN

"SPLIT! Split!"

The morning was warm and young; Mount Davidson's side was golden with sunflowers. On the long front piazza Mr. Madigan's canaries, in their mammoth cage, were like to burst their throats for joy in the promise of summer. Irene, every lithe muscle a-play, was hanging by her knees on the swinging-bar, her tawny hair sweeping the woodshed floor as she swung.

"Split, I say!"

The tone was commanding—such a tone as Sissy dared assume only on Saturday mornings, when her elder sister's necessities delivered Irene the Oppressor into her hands.

"Split Madigan!"

In the very exhilaration of effort—the use of her muscles was joy to her—Split paused to wish that the house might fall on Sissy; that she might suddenly become dumb; that the key

to the piano might be lost—anything that would avert her own impending doom.

But none of these things happened; they never did happen, no matter how passionately the second of the Madigans longed for them on the last day of the week.

"Split—you know very well you hear me," the voice cried, coming nearer.

Split burst into song. She was a merry, merry Zingara, she declared in sweet, strong cadence, with a boisterous chorus of tra-la-las that rivaled the canaries'; and the louder she sang, the faster she swung, so that she was really half deaf and wholly giddy when she felt Sissy's hand on her ankle.

"Oh, is that you, Sissy?" she asked, sweetly surprised, peering out from under her bushy mane.

"Yes, it 's me, Sissy!" Cecilia's small, round face was stern. "And you 've heard me from the very first, and if you want any—"

"Shall I show you how to skin the cat, Sis?" Irene interrupted hastily, pulling herself up with a jerk.

But Sissy was fat and had none of her sister's wiry agility. She declined; her mind was attuned to other issues just then, and her soul was a-quiver with malicious, anticipatory

glee; for this was the day of Split's music lesson, and her teacher was none other than Sissy herself.

"So, if you want it," the younger sister's voice rose threateningly, "you 've got to come now."

"Let 's leave it till the afternoon." Split's voice came from somewhere in the midst of her evolutions.

"Will you come?" demanded Sissy peremptorily. "Once!"

How could Split answer? Her mouth was tight shut; she was pulling herself up inch by inch, slowly, slowly, till her chin should rest upon the bar.

"Will you come? Twice!"

Split's face was purple, and there was an agonized prayer for delay in her eyes.

"Will you come? Third—and la-ast—" Sissy prolonged the note quaveringly. It was not her intention to provoke her victim beyond endurance. These lessons, which gave her the whip-hand over the doughty and invincible Split, were far too precious to her.

"And la-ast," she repeated inexorably.

With a thud Irene dropped to the floor. Leaving all her light-heartedness behind in the dusk of the shed, where the trapeze still swung,

she followed, a sullen captive; while Cecilia, gloating like the despot she was, led the way.

"We 'll begin with the piece," said Spilt, eagerly, seating herself before the piano.

"No; scales and exercises first," declared Sissy, firmly. "Sit farther back, Split, and keep your wrist up."

Split moved the stool a millionth of an inch. Why, oh, why had she quarreled with Professor Trask? If some one had only told her that her own rebellion would mean the substitution of Cecilia for herself as his pupil, and another opportunity for that apt young perfectionist to outrank her senior!

With a rattling verve, and a dime on each wrist, which Professor Cecilia had placed there to effect a divorce between finger and arm movement, Irene attacked her scales and exercises. She loathed five-finger exercises. So did the talented but lazy Sissy, who knew well from experience what torture would most try her victim's soul. Split merely wanted to play well, to outplay Cecilia, to be independent of her and play her own accompaniments.

"Lift your fingers, Split. You must raise your wrist," came in an easy tone of command. " Repeat that, please. Again. There goes the

dime again! If you 'd keep your wrist steady, it would n't fall off. No; you 're playing altogether too fast. Slowly! slow-ly! Bad fingering! bad fingering! Wretched! Wait, I 'll mark it for you."

With her nicely pointed long pencil, Sissy, a martinet for technic, assumed all the airs of her own professor and prepared to explain the obvious.

"No, you don't!" Irene's hand shot out from the keys to the sheet-music, scattering the dimes; her wide-spread fingers covered the spot Sissy contemplated adorning with prettily made figures.

"Don't what?" asked Sissy.

"Oh, Miss Innocence! Don't be so affected, that 's what! Don't put on so many airs! Don't pretend you know it all, Sis Madigan!"

"Why, Split! Do you s'pose I *want* to put the fingering down?"

"You do; but you sha'n't!" exclaimed Split, savagely.

"All I want to do is to help you," said Sissy, with well-bred forbearance.

"Well, don't show off, then."

Split withdrew her hand, and the lesson proceeded.

"I 'll play your piece for you first, Split,

to show you how it ought to go." Sissy rose, her calico rustling, to change the professorial chair for the stool of the demonstrator.

But Split sat like a rock.

"Professor Trask always does, Split."

There was an abused note in Sissy's voice that deceived her sister. In the perennial game of "bluff" these two played, each was alert to detect a weakness in the other; and Irene thought she had found one now. Ignoring her professor, she placed "In Sweet Dreams" on the rack before her, and gaily and loudly, and very badly, began to play.

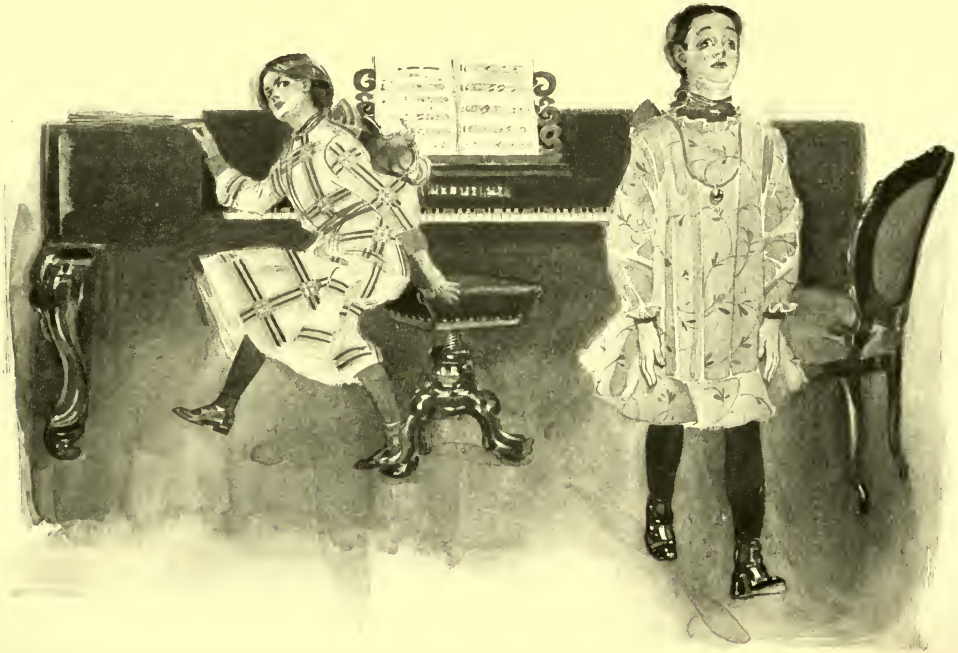
Sissy rose majestically. Her correct ear was outraged, her small mouth was shut tight. Without a word she resigned her post and made for the door. She had quite reached it before Split capitulated.

"Play it, then, you mean thing," she cried, flouncing off the stool, "if it 's going to do you any good!"

Sissy hardened. She had a way of becoming adamant on rare occasions that really struck terror to Split's facile soul, which resented a grudge promptly and as promptly forgot all about it.

"I don't care to play it," said Sissy, loftily.

"Well—I want you to—now."



"'Play it, then, you mean thing,' she cried, . . . 'if it 's going to do you any good!'"

CLEVELAND

"But I don't want to."

"Ain't you going to give me my lesson, then?" demanded Split, hoarsely. "I thought you were so anxious to help me!"

Sissy was mute. Hers was a strong position, she felt.

"D' ye expect me to get down on my knees?" Irene's wrathful voice rose, and her unstable temper rocked threateningly. A Madigan would willingly have been flayed alive rather than apologize in so many words.

"I don't expect anything at all," remarked Sissy, coldly.

"Well, you 'd better expect, for"—with a swift motion that cut off her sister's retreat and put her own back to the door—"you 'll play that piece before you go out of this room."

Without a word Sissy plumped down on the floor. Unconcernedly she pulled her jackstones out of her pocket, and soon their regular click-clock and the deft thump of her small, fat fist was all that was heard in the room.

It always seemed to Split that the last occasion of a disagreement between herself and the sister nearest to her in years, and furthest from her in temperament, was the most intolerable. Never in her life, she thought, had she

so longed to murder Sissy as at this minute. She—Split—had no time to waste besieging the impregnable fortress of Sissy's mulishness, when the hardening process had really set in. There never was time enough on Saturdays to do half what one planned, and to-day was the day of Crosby Pemberton's party, besides.

And still Split remained at the door, and still Sissy played jackstones. Twice there were skirmishes between besieger and besieged —once when Split crept upon Sissy and, with a quick thrust of her slim, straight leg, disarranged an elaborate scheme for "putting horses in the stable," and once when there was a strategic sortie from Sissy, which failed to catch the enemy napping.

It was Split who finally yielded, as, with rage in her heart, she had known from the very beginning would be the case. But no Madigan ever laid down her arms and surrendered formally.

Split threw open the door with a bang. "Go out, then, miss! go out!" she commanded.

Calmly and skilfully Sissy finished the "devil on a stump," the last of those ornamental additions the complexities of which appeal to experts in the game; then she gath-

ered up her beloved jackstones and got to her feet. But dignity forbade that she should leave the room just when her foe had ordered her to go. So she ignored the invitation, and going to the piano, sat down in an ostentatiously correct position, requiring many adjustments and readjustments, and began to play "The Gazelle."

She played prettily, did this young person, who seemed to Split specially designed to infuriate her. And to-day she played "with expression," soft-pedaling and lingering upon certain passages in a way which the Madigans considered shameless.

"Oh, the affected thing! Just listen to her! How she does put on!" sneered Split to the world at large.

Sissy's lips opened, then closed tightly. She had almost answered, for no Madigan may be accused of sentimentality and live unavenged. Only a moment, though, was she at a loss. Then calmly, prettily, she glided into Split's own particular "piece." She knew this would draw blood. And it did.

"You sha'n't play it now! You sha'n't!" Split cried, her ungovernable temper aroused. She dashed impetuously for the piano and tore the sheet of music from the rack.

It was the thing for which she had suffered so many lessons; for which she had sat feeling like a mean-spirited imbecile with Sissy's impertinent finger under her wrist, while all outdoors was calling to her; for which she had forborne often and often during the week, only to be more thoroughly bullied on Saturdays. Yet she tore it across and recklessly trampled it underfoot. Then with her hands over her ears, lest she hear the imperturbable and maddeningly excellent Sissy play "In Sweet Dreams" without the notes, Split fled.

Sissy played on till the very last bar; she had an idea that Split might be ambushed out in the hall. But when she got to the end and heard no sound from there, she decided that the enemy was indeed vanquished, and she rose to close the piano. As she did so she got a view of an elegantly stout and very upright lady coming up the front steps, with a fair, pale boy by her side.

With an agility commendable in one so round, Sissy dropped beneath the piano, and, whipping off her apron, proceeded to wipe the dust from the back legs of the instrument with it. This done, she rammed the apron up between the wall and the piano, and was seated, breathless, but with a bit of very dirty white

"'Go and shake hands properly, like a little gentleman,' bullied Mrs. Pemberton"

embroidery in her hands, when the lady entered.

"Ah, Cecilia, busy as usual," she said in an important, throaty voice.

"Yes, Mrs. Pemberton," said Sissy, softly.

"You see, Crosby, that even a child may make use of spare moments. Why don't you say how-d'-ye-do to Cecilia? Where 're your manners?" demanded the lady.

"Yes, 'm. How-do, Sissy?" asked the boy, uncomfortably. He was a very prim child, immaculately dressed, his smooth hair plastered neatly down over his forehead; and he sat bolt upright on the edge of his chair, for he knew well his mother's views about lounging.

"Go and shake hands properly, like a little gentleman," bullied Mrs. Pemberton.

With a sickly smile Crosby walked over to Sissy and grasped her hand. He let it go with an "Ouch!" that made Mrs. Pemberton turn majestically and glare at him.

"I 'm so sorry I stuck you, Crosby," said Sissy, softly, smoothing out her embroidery. "I forgot there was a needle in my work."

Crosby looked at her; he knew just how sorry she was.

"The thing to say, Crosby," thundered his mama, "is, 'Not at all, not at all, Cecilia!' "

"Not at all—not at all, Cecilia," squeaked the boy, his thin voice like a faint echo of his mother's heavy contralto.

Sissy yearned to beat him; she always did. That she did not invariably yield to her desire to express her resentment of so awfully mothered a person, was due solely to a sentiment of chivalry: he was so weak and so devoted to herself, and it took some courage to be devoted to Sissy.

"I 'm ashamed of my son!" thundered Mrs. Pemberton.

Yes, Sissy knew that formula. She had heard the announcement first one memorable day at school when she led a revolt against the master—a revolt which only the girls of her clique were expected to indorse. But Crosby, either because he was so accustomed to playing with girls that he considered himself one of them, or because of that dogged devotion which even so stern a puritan as Sissy could not sufficiently discourage, had taken the cue from her lips. He, too, had failed publicly and vicariously, in the very presence of his lion-hearted, bull-voiced mother, and sat a white-faced criminal awaiting execution, when Mrs. Pemberton, rising in her voluminous black silk skirts, like an outraged and peppery hen,

stood a moment speechless with wrath, and then broke forth with her denunciation before the whole school, visitors and all. "Mr. Garvan," she had exclaimed in a deep voice all a-tremble, "I am ashamed of my son!" and sailed majestically from the room. Crosby's action had really touched Sissy at the time, though, like the diplomat she was, she had promptly disowned it.

But to-day Mrs. Pemberton's shame did not too much affect her offspring, who sat, not quite so upright now, squeezing the blood from the finger that Sissy's needle had pricked.

"Let me look at your embroidery, Cecilia," said the lady, patronizingly.

Sissy rose and brought it to her. Before Crosby she tried not to show it, but this little Madigan was really suffering in her perfect soul: she embroidered so badly, and knew it so well.

"H'm!" Mrs. Pemberton drew off her glove. "Make your stitches even, and keep your work clean—like this—like this—see?"

Sissy saw. Under the firm, big, white hand the strawberry leaves and blossoms sprang up and flourished. Mrs. Pemberton loved to embroider; her voice was almost gentle when she

painted on linen with her needle, and then only did she forget to bully her boy.

"Perhaps you will play for us, Cecilia, if I do a bit of your work for you?"

Sissy knew it was coming. Mrs. Pemberton always asked her to play, and playing for company was pure show-off from a Madigan point of view. Split would hear and taunt her with it later, she knew. But though she scorned the servile and down-trodden Crosby, Sissy, no more than he, dared disobey that grenadier, his mother. She took her seat at the piano, opened a Beethoven that Mrs. Pemberton had given her the last Christmas, under the impression that she was fostering a taste for the classical, and, with a revengeful little hand that could n't reach the octaves, she began to murder the "Funeral March."

Just as the performer let her hands fall upon the last somber chord (her puritanical soul enjoying the double dissipation of pretending to herself while she afflicted others), she lifted her eyes to the mirror over the piano and saw Irene out in the hall. In the mirror their eyes met, and the mockery in Irene's was unmistakable as Sissy rose, agitated, caught in the very act of showing off, convicted of being affected.

"Very pretty; very pretty, indeed!" said Mrs. Pemberton, absent-mindedly. "Now play another little waltz."

"Aunt Anne says, Mrs. Pemberton," put in Irene, entering, "will you come to her room?"

Mrs. Pemberton rose, her deft hands still calling forth the perfection of fruit from the stubborn linen soil upon which Sissy could make nothing grow, and sailed across the hall. Crosby immediately jumped from his chair.

"I say, Sissy," he cried, "I know an awful swell way to cut paper-doll dresses."

Sissy looked at him. For all her sins (and in a hidden corner of her heart that she rarely looked into, she knew herself for the hypocrite she was, despite all her self-righteous pretense) this girl-boy's devotion was her punishment. She did not envy Split her successes; in fact, she often disapproved the methods by which they were attained. Her pride would permit her neither to make such conquests, nor to enjoy them when they were made; but she cursed her fate that Crosby Pemberton had fallen to her share. For the love of a really bad boy Sissy felt she could have sacrificed much—for a fellow quite out of the pale, a bold, wicked pirate of a boy who would say "Darn," and even smoke a cigarette; a dare-

devil, whose people could do nothing with him; a fellow with a swagger and a droop to his eyelid and something deliciously sinister in his lean, firm jaw and saucy black eye—a boy like Jack Cody, for instance, for whom a whole world of short-skirted femininity divided itself naturally into two classes: just girls—and Split Madigan. But that a forthright, practical, severe person like herself should be made ridiculous by Crosby's worship, and that Split, her arch-enemy, should be there to hear her adorer make his sexless declaration, was too much! Even a Madigan could not bear up under it. When Sissy looked from "Miss Crosby" (as the very girls who played with him called him) to Split, there were tears of rage trembling in her eyes.

But, with a generosity suspiciously unlike her, Split ignored the signal of distress. "What time this afternoon will the party begin, Crosby?" she asked.

"Oh, two o'clock. But you 'll come early, won't you—Sissy?"

Sissy did not answer. She was waiting to see what Split's next move would be.

"I don't know that I can go," said Split, gently. "I have n't any gloves—unless—won't you ask father for some, Sissy?"

There was a prompt refusal upon Sissy's lips, but she did not utter it; the Pembertons' visit had given the enemy too much material with which to regale her fellow-Madigans at the dinner-table in the evening. Sissy looked questioningly into Split's eyes, and silently the bargain was struck: to so much refraining from ridicule in public on the part of one, a certain indebtedness which the other might discharge by facing Francis Madigan with a demand for money. It was hard, but Sissy shut her teeth and got to her feet.

"Can I come with you, Sissy?" asked Crosby, following her to the door. "If you 'll let me have your tissue-paper and the scissors, I 'll show—"

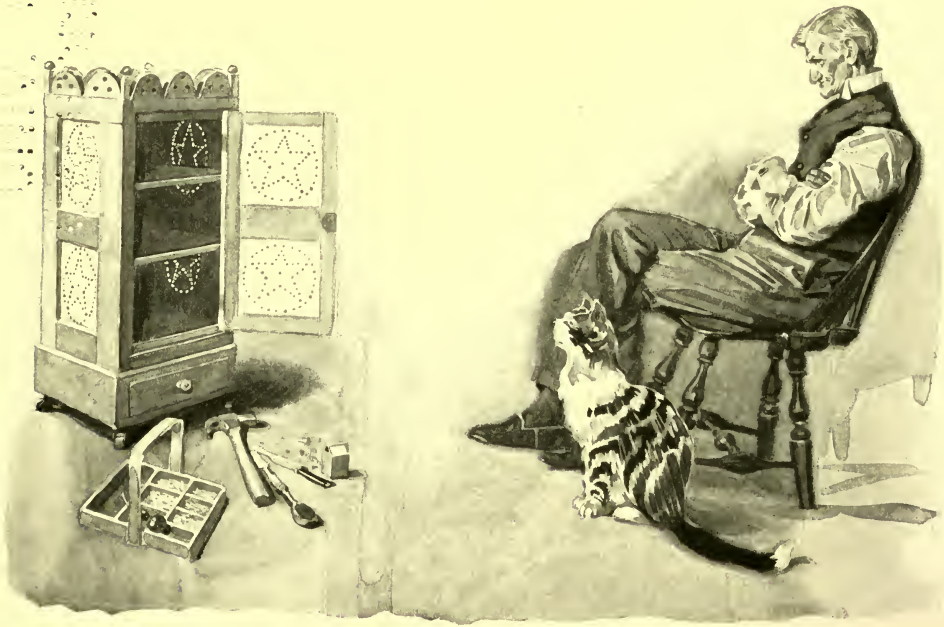
Sissy's hands flew to her breast. "I wish —I wish you 'd never speak to me again!" she exclaimed, and Crosby dodged as though he were apprehensive that she might beat him.

"It 's so kind of you to go the very minute I ask," giggled Split, gleefully.

But Sissy shut the door behind her on Crosby's woeful face and Split's radiantly happy one, and went to her fate.

Francis Madigan's room was his castle. It was his castle and his workshop and his bou-

doir, his kitchen, his library, and his pantry in one. The laxness of the family housekeeping had led him to distrust all hands and heads but his own. Everything that he wanted, or that he might want in the near future, he kept under his eyes, within reach of his hands, where none might borrow or lose or destroy. In order to provide for the needs which grew and changed daily, he fitted up rude shelf above shelf, till the corners of the room were transformed into rough bric-à-brac stands. Mr. Madigan had the unsuccessful man's pride in trifling successes in amateur carpentering, in husbandry of any sort unrelated to the real issues of his life; and every tool he needed for the exercise of his skill he kept under lock and key. He believed in, he trusted no Madigan. He had been known to lend his penknife to Sissy, but that was when she was ailing long ago. He laid in supplies as though he had inside information of a famine near at hand; and his pipes and his great cans of tobacco were piled up with his cards and his books on the table where he played solitaire all day and read half the night. The sweets he liked occasionally, and the day's provision of fruit (for he ate fruit only and at this time looked upon a vegetarian as a coarse creature who be-



"Of the design and construction of which he was quite vain"

longed to a dead era), were packed in a small home-made pantry of the design and construction of which he was quite vain. His bed swathed in sheets; his blankets sewed securely together, as though he feared they might escape; a device all his own of great wooden wedges raising the lower end of the mattress so that his feet were on a level with his pillowed head; the chest of little drawers which his daughters called "father's hobby," nailed high on the wall and filled with all sorts of odds and ends, the detritus and possible repair-material of years of housekeeping—all this Sissy took in with the unseeing eyes one has for the familiar.

She did not expect her father's room to be like any one else's; neither did she look for an easy and successful termination to her quest. Sometimes she got what she asked for, but she asked for little. And to-day Francis Madigan had been tinkering at the old house, hammering here and patching there, a process that specially tried his temper, being a threatening indication of change, which he resented by declaring that "everything goes to the devil."

"Father," began Sissy, carefully, as she met his inquiring eye, "do you approve of dancing?"

He looked up from his cards. "What nonsense are you talking now?"

"Because Irene and I have a good chance to practise it—dancing—this afternoon."

"Well—practise," he growled.

"Shall we? All right. It 's Crosby's party, you know. He 's thirteen to-day. It 's his party. His mother 's giving it for him at Cooper's Hall. And there 'll be dancing and—"

"Nonsense!"

"Yes," agreed Sissy, sweetly. "But we 'll go if you say so. I won't need any dress, and—" she hurried on as he raised his head belligerently, "neither will Irene. Is n't that lucky? My brown will do, though the overskirt does jump up when I dance and show the red sham underneath; but—"

"What are you bothering me about, then?" he demanded indignantly, throwing down his cards.

"Gloves," she said gently. Then quickly, before he could speak, "That 's all. They don't cost very much. Or, I 'll tell you,"—her voice grew suddenly most cheerful, as though she had made a discovery that must delight him,—"we can wear mitts. I don't mind—and neither will Split. Just a pair

of blue lace ones for her and pink for me, or —or—" her voice wavered, but she was ready to pay the price, "just blue ones for Split, father."

He put his hand in his pocket. "Why not just pink ones for Sissy?" he asked almost good-naturedly.

Sissy shook her head, but the red rushed to her cheeks. She had won!

"Are you sure you need them?" he asked cautiously in the very act of bestowal.

"Sure! Sure!" she cried, throwing her arms gratefully about his neck before she danced to the door.

"But you 're going, too?" he called after her. "All right, then. Make Irene behave. She 's an ox—that girl."

An ox, of course, interpreted variously according to Madigan's mood and the correlating circumstances, signified this time an indiscreet, pleasure-mad child. Sissy understood, and she blushed for her sister. In fact, she was always blushing for her sister. She considered it to be her duty formally and officially to disavow her senior. So reprehensible did she feel Split's conduct to be that some one must blush for it; and as blushing was not Split's forte, Sissy did it for her.

And she really did it very well, with an assumption of chagrin that could not fail to call attention subtly to the contrast between the sisters. When Split failed in her lessons with a completeness, a sensational ostentation that was shocking to Sissy, that Number 1 scholar blushed gently, and, discreetly lowering her head, became absorbed in her work. After school, when Split was being kept in and disciplined (a process which never failed effectually to discipline the hardy individual who attempted it), when she wept and stormed and raged and threw caution to the winds as only tempestuous Split could, then was Sissy's attitude a marvel of disapproving rectitude. She had a great deal of dignity, had Sissy, and the picture of holiness that she presented as, with her books on her arm, she walked past the desk where the sobbing sinner's head lay with tumbled curls and bloated face, came as near as anything could to quench the passion of tears in which Split's tempers culminated. On such occasions the infuriated Split was wont, for just a moment, to conquer the half-hysterical sobs that threatened to choke her as well as inundate the world, and make a face at Saint Cecilia as she passed holily by. But Cecilia was a Madigan always, as well as a

saint temporarily, and her eyes were turned prudently away just then, as though she were already studiously pondering to-morrow's lesson.

But Sissy blushed her most perfect disapproval when she played chaperon to her elder sister. It was a position for which she felt herself peculiarly fitted, even without the semi-official commission she held—a position which so conscientious a person could not regard in the light of a sinecure.

As she danced only the more sedate dances, because of that obtrusive tendency of the red sham to her skirt, Sissy was able to chaperon her senior all the more effectively at Crosby Pemberton's party. Irene danced like a thing whose vocation is motion. She was a twig in a rain-storm, a butterfly seeking sweets, a humming-bird whose wing beat the air with a very rhapsody of rhythm. She was on the floor with the first note Professor Trask struck, and she danced down the side of the little hall, when the waltz was over and all the other couples had seated themselves, as though the meter of the music had bewitched her feet and they might nevermore walk soberly.

"Split—don't!" It was the shocked voice of her young chaperon.

"Sissy—don't!" mocked the mutinous Split.

Even after she took the seat beside Sissy, her heels were lifted and the toes of her slippers were beating time. She sat there chattering to a group of boys buzzing about her, upon whom her high spirits had the effect that dance-music had upon herself.

"You 're the prettiest girl I 've seen since I left the city, Irene," patronizingly whispered the boy lately from San Francisco, whose metropolitan elegances had dazzled the eyes of the mountain maidens.

"I wonder how many girls Will Morrow 's said that to this afternoon!" came like a sarcastic douche from Sissy, who conceived it to be a chaperon's duty to take the conceit out of citified chaps.

Young Morrow turned to find a small woman in brown eying him disdainfully.

"Well—well, I never said it to you, anyway," he retorted gallantly.

"Good reason why. You knew I would n't believe you," Sissy declared, floundering in her anger.

"Neither would anybody else."

"Why? Because you said it? Did n't know you had such a reputation." Sissy was recovering. "Never mind, Split," she added,

"The Belle of the Afternoon"

heavily sarcastic and assuming a comforting air that maddened Irene, who desired nothing more than to impress her new suitor with the elegant gentility of her manner, her family's, and all that was hers. "Just to have a boy from the city even pretend to think you 're good-looking is worth living for. Boys know so much—in the city!" she concluded witheringly.

Mr. Morrow from San Francisco looked bewildered. He had merely paid what he considered a very dashing compliment to one girl, when lo! the other overwhelmed him with her contempt. He turned for consolation to Irene.

"I 'll show you how they dance the two-step in the city," he said, holding out his hand as the music began again.

But he had reckoned without that stern censor of sisterly manners, Cecilia Madigan; that loyal Comstocker who resented the implication of her town's inferiority, quite independent of the fact that the insult was not addressed to her but to one who, apparently, welcomed it.

"I think I 'll go home now, Split," she remarked carelessly, rising.

A sudden blight fell upon the belle of the afternoon. When Sissy went, go she must, too; this was the sole rule of conduct Francis

Madigan had devised for the guidance of his most headstrong daughter.

"Oh, Sissy—not till after supper!" she pleaded piteously.

"I—I 've got some studying to do for the examination Monday," explained the exemplary member of Mr. Garvan's class and society at large.

"Just wait till this one dance is over!" Coaxing was not Split Madigan's forte; she was accustomed to demand.

But it was just that one dance that Sissy, the pure and patriotic, could not countenance.

A quick flash of fury lighted Irene's eye. To be bossed publicly and before Mr. Will Morrow of San Francisco! In her heart she swore to be avenged; yet she dropped Mr. Morrow's hand and shook her head to all his pleadings, as she followed her ruthless tyrant across the floor to the little dressing-room.

But as the sisters emerged from the dressing-room door, Crosby Pemberton and his cousin Fred stopped them.

"You 're not going home, Split?" begged Fred. "I 've been looking everywhere for you. Oh, come and dance just this one with me!"

"Sissy 's going," said Split, the lilting of

the music stirring her pulses and lifting her feet, despite the unmusical rage she was in, "and I 've got to go, too."

"Won't you stay—won't you wait just for this one, Sissy?" begged Fred.

"Why—certainly," acquiesced the gentle Sissy.

Split gasped with amazement. But she wasted no time, throwing off her jacket with a quick twist of her wrist. Later she might fathom the tortuosities of her tyrant's mind. All she knew now was that she might dance. With whom was a small matter to Split Madigan.

Sissy watched her dance away, delight and malice in her eye. She was watching till Mr. Morrow from the city should behold her revenge. But Crosby did not know this, and he had plans of his own.

"Come and play a game over in the corner, just till this dance 's over, won't you, Sissy?"

"What kind of a game?" she demanded, following him mechanically.

"Oh, a new game. It 's lots of fun. I 'll show you."

Sissy consented. She could play a game—and she knew she was clever at all games—without fear of betrayal from that red sham

which she had been fiercely sitting upon half the afternoon.

Before long, her emulative spirit got her so interested in this particular game that she forgot not only the sham skirt but the sham pretense upon which she had bullied Irene. And she played so well that there was only one forfeit against her name, though Crosby, who had named himself treasurer, held half the bangle bracelets and pins and handkerchiefs of the little circle as evidence of dereliction in others.

He called her name first, as he stood with her little turquoise ring in his hand and an odd light in his eye that might have enlightened her; but she was looking toward the door, where the young gentleman from San Francisco, in a Byronic pose, was staring gloomily at Irene dancing with a rival, and so joying in the dance that she had forgotten all about him.

"Open your mouth and shut your eyes,
And I 'll give you something to make you wise,' "

chanted Crosby, holding out the ring and beckoning to her.

Closing her eyes upon the spectacle of Mr.

Morrow's suffering, Sissy opened a mouth about which the malicious smile still lingered.

Crosby hesitated a moment. He was very much afraid of her, but as she stood, docile and innocent, before him, with her eyes shut and her tiny red mouth open, he could not fancy consequences nearly so well as he could picture the thing his wish painted.

In a moment he had realized it, and Sissy, overwhelmed by astonishment, dumb and impotent with the audacity of the unexpected, felt his arms close about her and his greedy lips upon hers.

Oh, the rage and shame of the proper Sissy! Her mouth fell shut and her eyes flew open. And then, if she could, she would have closed them forever; for, before her in the sudden silence, towering above the triumphant and unrepentant Crosby, stood Mrs. Pemberton, a portentous figure of shocked matronly disapproval. And she promptly placed the blame where mothers of sons have placed it since the first similar impropriety was discovered.

"Cecilia!" she cried in that velvety bass that echoed through the room—"Cecilia Madigan, you—teaching my son a vulgar kissing game—you, the good one! Oh, you deceitful little thing!"

A MERRY, MERRY ZINGARA

A MERRY, MERRY ZINGARA

IT had been Crosby Pemberton's custom to climb the steps that led to Madigan's every Wednesday afternoon at four, with his music neatly done up in a roll, on his way to play duets with Sissy.

On the Wednesday that followed his birthday party—the mere mention of which, after the lapse of four days, was enough to send Sissy into hysterics—that young lady was seated in the parlor, ready for her guest. She was ready for him in all the senses a Madigan knew how to infuse into that frame of mind. She intended to make him as miserable as she herself had been ever since that disgraceful episode in which she had so innocently played the victim's part. She would show the betrayer of trust no mercy—none. She would accept no apology. She would trample upon his excuses and tear them limb from limb. She would show him her scorn and detestation and make him feel how everlastingly unforgivable

his offense was; then she would send him forth forever from the house, and dare him to so much as speak to her at school.

She pictured him going down the stairs for the last time, utterly wretched, broken, despised, condemned. And in order to make the picture more real, she glanced out of the window. Suddenly her hands flew in terror to her breast, and all her plans for vengeance were left hanging in mid-air; for it was not Crosby's trim little figure that was climbing the steps, but the stately solidity of Mrs. Pemberton herself.

In her extremity, Sissy did not even stop to look at the back legs of the piano; she sped across the room and made a flying leap through the low west window. Mrs. Pemberton, glancing in through the open door as she rang the bell, got a glimpse of two plump disappearing legs, but when she and Miss Madigan entered, there was no trace of Sissy except her jackstones. They stumbled over these, lying scattered on the floor, where she had been sitting waiting for Crosby and concocting schemes of punishment.

"I come to explain—" said Mrs. Pemberton, stiffly and a bit out of breath, seating herself with a rigidity of backbone that would have

justified Sissy's bestowal upon her of the nickname Mrs. Ramrod, if she could have seen it. But Sissy, lying attentive beneath the open window, could not see; she could only hear. "I am here to tell you, Miss Madigan, why Crosby did not come to-day to play duets."

"Dear me! did n't he come?" asked Miss Madigan, absently. "He is n't sick, is he? Irene complains of headache and backache, and she 's so languid she let Sissy get the wish-bone —I call it the bone of contention—at dinner yesterday without a struggle. I 'm half afraid she 'll not be able to sing to-night at Professor Trask's concert; but perhaps it 's only that she danced too much at Crosby's party. She al—"

"It 's about that—about the party that I wanted to speak to you," interrupted Mrs. Pemberton, severely.

"Yes? Such a lovely party, the girls say! I 'm sure, Mrs. Pemberton, it 's just—"

"Did they tell you what—occurred?"

Miss Madigan blinked reflectively. Her acquaintance with the stately and wealthy Mrs. Warren Pemberton was her most prized social connection. What could have occurred?

"Why, of course, of course!" she laughed after a bit, pleasantly, still trying to remem-

ber what the girls had gossiped about. "De-lightful, was n't it?"

Mrs. Pemberton lifted her plumed head with a slow and terrible solemnity. "De-lightful, Miss Madigan, de-lightful!"

The smile vanished from Miss Madigan's face. "I hope, dear Mrs. Pemberton, that the girls did nothing that—that— They 're such madcaps, and their father never will—"

Miss Madigan's distress touched her august visitor. "I trust this," she said significantly, "will be a lesson to Mr. Madigan."

"What—what will? If there 's a lesson for Madigan, let him have it direct, Mrs. Pemberton."

Lying flat on her stomach beneath the window, Sissy heard her father's voice come clanging harshly on the lighter-timbred dialogue. Cautiously she raised herself on her elbow and let a single eye peer through the curtain at the group within. There, with his paint-pot in his hand, his brush and his pipe in the other, his unique nightcap rakishly on one side and drawn over his white head to protect it from the paint, Madigan stood in his overalls and heavy shirt—his Michelangelo costume, Kate had called it. He had been regilding an old mirror in his room, and having some gilt

left at the bottom of his can, he was going about the house in search of tarnished articles of virtu.

"Oh, Francis!" exclaimed his sister.

"Why, how do you do, Mr. Madigan?" said Mrs. Pemberton, bravely, putting out her hand. "I did not know you were within hearing."

"Or you would n't have offered the lesson? Well, give it to me, now that I am here. No, I won't shake hands; mine are all sticky with gilt." He rested his elbow on his hip and stood at ease.

A savage delight at this outrage upon gentility in Mrs. Ramrod's very presence possessed that red republican Sissy. She giggled within herself, Madigan's attitude, his streaked and gilded face, his confident voice, showed such delightful indifference to the effect his unconventional attire must have upon this Priestess of Form.

"I must beg your pardon, Mr. Madigan," said that lady, in her most official tone, "for using the expression I did. The matter I wished to bring to Miss Madigan's attention—and to yours, now that you are here—concerns one of your daughters. I should have come to tell you of it before, as was my duty, as I would wish any mother to do for me were it

my daughter; but I have been busy helping the Misses Bryne-Stivers and Professor Trask with this concert for to-night. This must be my apology for the delay. For speaking—for telling you what I have to tell, no mother could apologize."

"H'm!" Madigan cleared his throat threateningly, and out in the sage-brush Sissy shook with apprehension. She knew that preliminary bugle-call to battle.

"I assure you, my dear Mrs. Pemberton, we can have only the kindest feelings for any one who will take an interest in those motherless—"

"Let Mrs. Pemberton go on, Anne," interrupted Madigan, harshly. "Just what is it, ma'am? Out with it."

Mrs. Pemberton rose, rustling her heavy silks.

"Merely, Mr. Madigan, that with my own eyes I saw your daughter take part in a vulgar kissing game—the only occurrence of any kind that marred the perfect propriety of my son's birthday party."

There was a long silence inside. Sissy, without, her heart beating so loud that she was afraid it might drown all other sounds, heard, despite it, Aunt Anne's gasp of horror, the

tinkle of the jet on Mrs. Pemberton's heavy gown, the squeaking of her father's paint-spotted slippers as he shifted his weight.

Finally it came. "That ox!" exclaimed Madigan, in a rage.

Mrs. Pemberton moved in majesty toward the door. "My son," she said slowly, "chivalrously tries to take the blame from her and insists that he proposed the game himself. But I know Crosby to be incapable of such a thing."

"H'm! Yes. So do I," assented Madigan.

Miss Madigan turned to her brother, and in a voice that suggested long years of martyrdom, said: "You will send her to the convent now, Francis? You positively must now. I really admire you for the way you have discharged a most unpleasant duty, Mrs. Pemberton. For years I 've insisted that Irene must—"

"Irene? Yes, if it had been Irene, one could expect it," remarked Mrs. Pemberton, funereally.

"But it was n't—it could n't be—"

"It was Cecilia." Mrs. Pemberton's grief-stricken tones conveyed all the disappointment she felt.

Cecilia, on her quaking knees, now peering

through the window, saw a quick change come over her father's dread countenance. It smoothed, it wrinkled, it twitched, and his shoulders began to shake silently.

"No! Sissy?" he exclaimed, with an appreciative chuckle, which made that young perfectionist outside feel seasick, as though the hillside had swelled up beneath her. "And who was the boy, might I ask?"

"It was"—Mrs. Pemberton paused to mark both her shocked surprise at Mr. Madigan's reception of the news, as well as the further enormity involved in its completion—"my son Crosby."

"No! Ha! ha! ha!" Madigan's rare laugh rang out.

Mechanically Sissy turned down her thumb to mark the number of times she had heard it, since Split and she had made a wager on it. Inwardly, though, she was nauseated by the thought that she was being laughed at. As nearly destitute as a Madigan could be of humor, she would so much rather have been flayed alive, she thought in the depths of her puritanical soul, than suffer ridicule.

"Crosby—eh?" Madigan was recovering. "Congratulate him for me. I did n't know the little milksop had it in him. You ought to

thank Sissy, ma'am, for proving that he is not really stuffed with sawdust. Where is she, anyway?''

Lying flat, her blushing face buried in the sage-brush, was Sissy at that moment, while Mrs. Ramrod rustled out of the room, precisely as she had done the day Crosby failed in the public oral examination in geography, Miss Madigan hurrying placatingly after.

But outside Sissy wept and would not be comforted. Her purist's pride was wounded; her prudish maiden's modesty was outraged—that her own father should believe it of her! And she must not open the subject or try to alter his opinion, for fear of the ridicule which seared her very soul!

A taste for the ethereally symbolic had not strongly manifested itself in Virginia City, yet under Professor Trask's direction ''The Cantata of the Flowers'' had been in active rehearsal for weeks. The professor relied upon the school-children for chorus material, and upon the Madigans to fill those lieutenancies without which the spectacular features of his production must be a failure—this last as a matter of course. For there were many Madigans, and those of them that were not leaders by in-

stinct had developed leadership through force of environment, a natural desire to bully others being not the least important by-product of being bullied. Besides, the reputation they had of being talented the professor knew to be almost as efficacious in lending children self-confidence as talent itself.

Kate, therefore, who could not sing a note, but who was grace embodied, led a chorus of Poppies, whose red tissue-paper garments creaked and rustled as they swayed, waving their star-tipped wands and chanting "Breathe we now our charmèd fragrance."

Florence and Bessie, whom the curse of being twins linked like galley-slaves, were Heather-bells in a childish chorus which piped forth the information "We are the Heather-bells: list to our song," but which was almost ruined by their common desire to get away from each other and lead in two different directions.

Quite self-possessed (even if she was very much off key), Sissy, who was the best "speaker" in her class, warbled her part of a sanctimonious little duet in which Heliotrope and Mignonette voiced the sentiment—

> " 'T is not in beauty alone we may find
> Purity, goodness, and wisdom combined "

"She was pronounced a 'regular little love' by the Misses Bryne-Stivers"

Even small Frances, most self-conscious of Madigans, in a costume so inadequate that Bep's doll would have been scandalized at the idea of wearing it, posed and attitudinized as a Dewdrop. She was pronounced a "regular little love" by the Misses Bryne-Stivers, whom the Madigans had nicknamed the Misses Blind-Staggers—a resentful play upon their hyphenated name, as well as a delicate reference to their blue goggles that might have served as blinkers.

For Irene, though, as the unquestioned possessor of a voice, a solo had been interpolated. She was to repeat, for the first time on the professional stage, that renowned success in "The Zingara" which school exhibitions had made famous.

Just before the time came for Split to sing, Sissy was hovering about the prima donna in the dressing-room. As Miss Heliotrope she wore the dark-purple gown which Aunt Anne had made over from her own wardrobe. (Being Comstock-born, Sissy knew no flower intimately, and could easily be imposed upon as to their habits and colors.) Above it her round little dark face looked almost sallow, in spite of the excited red that flamed in her cheeks.

The atmosphere of a theater was like wine to the Madigans. The smell of escaping gas

in the dark was, in itself, enough to transport them by association of ideas out of the workaday world; and emotion due to a dramatic situation was the one evidence of sensibility they permitted themselves.

Yet Sissy, who was tying the ribbons on Split's tambourine, looked in vain for a reflection of that fever of delight which possessed herself. Split was cross. She was languid. She was dull. She did not seem to enjoy even the pair of slippers she was pulling on. They had been given to Sissy by Henrietta Blind-Staggers, and their newness and beauty had tempted the poor Zingara. But if Sissy had not felt that the family fortunes were at stake, as she always did in the matter of a public appearance, she would never have made so generous an offer of her cherished property.

"But they seem awful tight, Split," she suggested.

"They 're nothing of the sort," snapped Split, wincing as she rose to her feet.

"I don't see how you 're going to dance in them."

"Will you just leave that to me, Miss Cecilia Morgan Madigan, and mind your own business?"

"'I don't see how you 're going to dance in them'"

Deeply offended, Sissy withdrew. No one called her Cecilia Morgan Madigan who did not want to wound her to the soul and remind her of an incident it were more generous to forget. She went out to the wings and stood there looking upon the stage and Professor Trask, who, as the Recluse, was gowned in mysterious flowing black, while he chanted "Here would I rest" in a hollow bass. But Sissy was worried. Not even being behind the scenes could still her apprehensions about Split. She longed to confide in some fellow-Madigan, but Kate was on the other side of the stage, and to all her winks and beckonings turned an uninterested back. Then, all at once, sooner than she expected, the Recluse departed, the scenes shifted; there, alone on the stage, looking white in the glare of the footlights, was a bedizened, big-eyed, panting little Zingara, and the syncopated prelude began.

Sissy's fingers thrummed it sympathetically upon her knee, but Trask, who was playing the accompaniment behind the scenes, had put an unfamiliar accent upon the notes. Out on the stage the Zingara was beating her tambourine sadly out of time and was longing, with a panicky fear, for the familiar touch of Sissy's hand upon the piano.

"Dum—dum - de - dum - dum—dum - dum—dum-dum!"

The notes came like a warning signal. The Zingara's throat was parched, her feet ached excruciatingly merely from carrying her weight—how, oh, how was she going to dance?

"Dum—dum - de - dum - dum—dum - dum—dum-dum!"

The last note prolonged itself into a summons. The Zingara's eye, turning from the faces that danced before her, sent appealing glances to the wings, where Sissy yearned toward her, all rivalry drowned in a mothering anxiety for her success.

"'I 'm a—mer-ry, meh-hi-ri-y—Zin-ga-ra!'" wailed Split, trying to get her breath. "'From a—gold-e-en—clime I come!'"

Sissy's hands flew to her breast, then with a wild gesture up over her ears, and she fled back to the dressing-room. Split the redoubtable, Split the invincible, the impudent, ready, pugnacious Split had stage-fright! The world rocked beneath Sissy's feet. Time stopped, and all the world stood agape witnessing a Madigan's failure! It seemed to the third of them that she could never bear to lift her head again and meet a Comstocker's eye and see there that shameful record against the

family. But she scrambled quickly to her feet when Irene came running in, "The Zingara" all unsung.

Irene's face was white and her eyes glittered. Sissy did not dare meet them, for, to a Madigan, to put a shame in words or looks was to double and triple it. She did not dare to condole; she had no heart to accuse. So she bent down again, ostensibly to tie her shoe, in order to give the furious little Zingara time to recover and to begin to undress. She heard the tambourine's tingling clatter as it was cast to the floor. She looked anywhere but at her sister, but she heard buttons give and buttonholes rend, and bowed her head to the storm.

"I must say," she remarked in a scornfully careless tone when the silence became oppressive, "that Trask plays funny accompaniments." And she lifted her head, fancying herself rather clever in finding a scapegoat.

She ducked immediately, but not in time. One of her own slippers,—oh, the irony of things!—torn off and thrown by Split's impatient hand, struck her in the face.

Sissy's cheek flamed. "Did you do that on purpose, Split Madigan?"

Split Madigan had not done it on purpose, for the reason mainly that it had not occurred

to her. But now that it was done, it was not in her present fury against all the world to disclaim intention to insult so small a part of it. Glad of an excuse to outrage some one, any one,—and, even then, preferably Sissy,—to make her sister share some of that hurt and sting and smart that burned within herself, she met Sissy's eye maliciously, triumphantly, significantly.

Sissy gasped. She took the slipper in her hand and made for her enemy. She intended, she believed, to ram her own best Sunday slipper down Split Madigan's throat! And she got quite close before she could have been made to believe that anything on earth or anywhere else could alter her intention. But a little thing did; merely the sound of voices outside the door and a swift, piteous change of expression in that defiant face opposite.

Sissy dropped the slipper and flew to the door. She had a glimpse—which she pretended not to have seen—of the Merry Zingara crumbling in a passion of regretful sobs to the floor. Then she was standing outside, her back to the closed door, a determined, fat little Horatius in purple, with two red cheeks, —one, indeed, redder than the other where the slipper had struck,—vowing to hold the bridge

"'But is she *very* sick?'"

against all comers, so that Split might mourn in peace.

"But is she *very* sick?" came the eager question.

"Well—pretty sick," said the doctor, gravely.

"Not very?" Sissy's voice fell disappointedly. She opened the door for him and stood at the head of the steps as he prepared cautiously to descend.

"You don't want your sister to be dangerously ill, do you?" Dr. Murchison demanded sharply, turning upon her.

"N-no," said Sissy.

"Well, see that you don't squabble with her. Your aunt ought to have sent for me five days ago, instead of which she lets a sick, nervous, half-crazy child dance and sing on the stage. All poppycock!"

"Can I help you down the first step, doctor?" asked Sissy, gratefully.

She was so thankful for his words. No one —not even a Madigan, accustomed to be held strictly accountable—could be to blame for a failure if she had been ill at the time. The family was almost rehabilitated, it seemed to Sissy.

The doctor's dim old eyes looked curiously at her. "I believe you 've got some deviltry in your head, Sissy. Now, you mind me and let your sister alone. There! I 'm all right now. I can go all right the rest of the way when I 'm once started down your infernal stairs. I ought to charge your father double rates for risking my old bones on them. Yes, it 's all right now. It 's only the first step that bothers me. It 's always the first step that costs—eh, Sissy?"

She looked blankly up at him.

He bent down and patted her head. "See here," he said, "I 'll bet you 've got more sense than you want us to believe."

Sissy blushed. It was a tardy tribute, she felt, but as welcome as it was deserved.

"With a lot of common sense and a physique like yours, you ought to make a good nurse. Take care of your sister," he added almost appealingly, divided between his knowledge of how poor a nurse Miss Madigan was and how impossible it was to tell this to her niece. "She 'll be cross and irritable and—even worse than usual," he said, with a grim smile that recognized the battle-ground upon which the Madigans spent their lives; and this recognition made him seem more human to them

than any other adult. "But you just treat her like a teething baby. She 's got a hard row to hoe, that poor, bad Split. She must sleep, and you understand her—Lord! Lord! the care these queer little devils need!" he muttered, shaking his shoulders as he went on down the steps, as though physically to throw off responsibility.

Sissy turned and went back into the house. It was a queer house, she thought. To her alert impressibility, the sickness and apprehension it inclosed were something tangible. She could taste the odors of the sick-room. She could feel the weight of the odd stillness that filled it. The sharpness of sound when it did come, the strangeness of suppressed excitement, the unfamiliar place with Split's quick figure missing, the loneliness of being without her, the boredom of lacking a playmate or a fighting-mate—it all affected Sissy as the prelude of a drama the end of which has something terrifyingly fascinating in it. It must be wonderful to die, thought Sissy, with a swift, satisfying vision of pretty young death—herself in white and the mysterious glamour of the silent sleep. Poor Sissy, who had never been ill!

Split, with shorn head and with wide-open

eyes and hard, flushed cheeks, lay tossing on the big bed in the room off the parlor, which had seldom been used since Frances was born there. "Mother's bed" the Madigans always called it, and they crept into it when ailing, as though it still held something of the old curative magic for childish aches, though all but Kate had forgotten the mother's face as it was before she lay down there the last time. Split had a big hot silver dollar in one hand, —Francis Madigan's way of recognizing and sympathizing with a child's illness,—and in the other an undivided orange, evidence enough of an extraordinary occasion in the Madigan household. But she was not waking. She was not sleeping. She was not dreaming. She knew that Sissy had come in and had squatted on the floor with Bep and Fom, playing dolls, probably. Yet she felt that numb, gradual, terrifying enlargement of her fingertips, of her limbs, of her tongue, her body, her head, that she had been told again and again was mere fancy. With a self-control that was unlike her, an unnatural product of her unnatural state, she locked her jaws together that she might not scream this once. And in the eery stillness that followed the effort, which had made her ears buzz and her temples throb,

she heard quite sanely Florence's denial of some charge her twin had brought against her.

"I did n't do any such thing," she whispered.

"You did," said Bep.

"I did n't."

"Cross your heart to die?"

The scream burst from Irene then—not the cry of delirium, but a sharp, terrified, if inarticulate, call for help. If there was one thing Split did respect, it was that Reaper whose name she could never hear without a quick indrawn breath. Yet—in her heart—she knew that, though others might fall at the touch of that fearful scythe, she, Split Madigan, as fleet of limb as a coyote and as sound of heart as a young pine-cone, could never, never die; that the world could never be when her quick red blood should be quiet and her mountain-bred lungs should be stilled.

With a bound Sissy pushed the twins out of the door. She was at the bedside when Miss Madigan entered.

"Go outside, Sissy!" she commanded. "Can't you see you 're exciting her? Is n't it hard enough for me to take care of her when she 's so cross? She 's not to be excited. She 's to be kept quiet. There, there, Irene—

it 's only fancy, I tell you! Look at your fingers; they 're thinner, littler than they ever were. Look at Sissy's; see how much bigger they are."

Irene lifted her fingers that had caught Sissy's. She looked from her own fevered hand to Sissy's dimpled one and was comforted. But her hold on her old enemy did not relax. She had something tangible now to reassure her; something that spoke to her in her own language. Her eyes closed, her tense little hand dropped wearily, but she held Sissy fast.

When she thought her patient was asleep, Miss Madigan tried to open her fingers, but, with something of her old waywardness, Irene resisted. And Sissy, with an old-fashioned nod of advice, motioned her aunt to let things be. She curled herself up on a corner of the bed, and—it being quite safe, no other Madigan being present but this unnatural one lying prone, half conscious, half dazed—she put her other hand over the one that held hers, and sat there quietly waiting.

The minutes came to seem like hours, but Sissy sat motionless and Miss Madigan left the room. Presently an eery humming came from Split's lips. Then, mechanically, Sissy's fin-

gers picked out on the spread the simple little melody Split sang as in a dream.

"Play it," the sick girl whispered, pushing away the hand she had held.

Sissy jumped as though she had been discovered indulging in gross and inexcusable sentimentality. She looked down at Split with a puzzled, sheepish smile, wondering how long it had been since her sister had come into the real world out of that fantastic one where marvelous things might happen.

"Play it!" repeated Split, fretfully.

Sissy rose and walked softly into the front room. She fancied if she took a long time, yet appeared about to obey, Split would forget her desire and, left alone in the silence, would fall asleep. She opened the piano softly and pulled out the stool. Then leisurely she pretended to arrange the light and the piano-cover.

Split, quieted by her apparent compliance, lay back with a sigh of content. Her mind, whose very apprehension of the delirium had excluded other thoughts, dwelt now restfully upon the combination of easy mental effort and soothing melody her "piece" meant to her. Besides, she was ordering her junior about, using her illness as a club to beat down remon-

strance. Split was really on the way to being herself again.

After a bit she found that she was almost dozing off, and waked with an indignant start to see Sissy stealing softly out of the room.

"Where are you going?" she demanded. "Why don't you play it when I tell you to?"

For an instant Sissy rebelled. Then she looked at the passionate little figure sitting tensely upright, at the white fever-circle about the dry lips, at the short hair and the unnaturally bright, angry eyes. She went back to the piano, sat down, and with her foot on the soft pedal, that Aunt Anne might not hear, she began to play.

The melody was simple and light, with a little break in its sweetness. Sissy's touch was childlike, but her impressionable temperament, quickened by the strangeness of that dark room behind her, overflowed into the melody her fingers brought out. The accompanying bass was rhythmic, and the nervous, fevered child found mental and physical occupation in letting the fingers of her left hand pick out its detail upon the pillow which she had lately thrown in a passion against the wall because it had been so hot and she so miserably uncomfortable.

Sissy had begun the second part, the changing bass of which had been poor Split's *pons asinorum.* It was the part to which Sissy had always given a dramatic touch—partly because, it being simpler music than she was accustomed to, she could safely do so, and partly because it irritated Irene, to whom the most forthright interpretation was difficult. Her foot slipped now, through force of habit, upon the hard pedal, and in a moment she heard the whirring of Aunt Anne's skirts.

"Sissy, are you crazy, you—" she heard behind her, and then there came a sudden, an unaccountable stop.

Sissy turned. Behind and above Miss Madigan towered tall old Dr. Murchison. He had come back, as usual, up the long flight of steps, for his forgotten spectacles. One of his hands was clapped with good-humored firmness over the lady's mouth; the other was pointing to Split, sleeping like a Madigan again, while over Aunt Anne's head the doctor nodded and bobbed encouragingly to Sissy, like a benignant musical conductor deprived of the use of his arms.

Sissy turned again to the piano. It was a beautiful opportunity for her to affect disgust with the situation; to register a silent, but ex-

pressive, exception to being compelled to entertain Irene; and to pose, not only before her aunt but before the doctor, too, as a very important personage, whose services were in urgent demand, and who yielded under protest. But as a matter of fact she was too happy. There was no misconceiving the light that illumined the doctor's round, rosy face. Something her undisciplined, childish imagination had been coquetting with, as an untried experience, though never admitting its full, dread significance, was carried out of her horizon by the shining look of success in old Murchison's face; something that shook her strong little body with a long shiver, as she realized, in the second when she could almost feel the lift of its dark wings taking flight, the thing that might have been.

So Sissy played "In Sweet Dreams" "with expression."

Later she played it, and over and over again, with the salt tears trickling down her nose and splashing on the keys; played it with tired, fat fingers and a rebellious, burning heart. But this was during Split's convalescence—a reign of terror for the whole household; for to the natural taste she possessed for bullying,

Split Madigan then added the whims and caprices of the invalid, who uses her weaknesses as a cat of a hundred tails with which to scourge her victims into compliance.

She was loath to get well, this tyrannical, hot-tempered, short-haired Zingara, who led her people such a merry dance, and she left the self-indulgent land of convalescence and the bed in the big back room with regret.

THE SHUT-UPS

THE SHUT-UPS

IT was an early-morning rite practised by the twins, its performance hidden from everybody but each other, to see whether Dr. Murchison's prophecy had come true.

"There were once two little girls—twins," began the old doctor, significantly, the day Bep and Fom were vaccinated, after battling desperately against precedence, in the doctor's very office. "Now all twins love each other dearly."

The twins looked at him pityingly. To be so old and so ignorant!

"Yes, they do," he insisted. "Everybody knows they 're fonder of each other than the closest sisters."

Bep glanced at Fom and Fom looked at Bep; there was something almost Chinese in the irony of their eyes; they knew just how fond of each other sisters can be! But they politely suppressed their incredulous grins.

"Well," resumed the old doctor, realizing how lacking in conviction his comparison might seem to a Madigan, "well, these twins were the exception: they did not love each other."

There was an interested movement from Bep.

"They hated each other."

Fom looked up eagerly; there was something human about such a tale. She felt her respect for Dr. Murchison reviving.

"They fought from morning till night. There was never a moment's peace when the two were together. Each was so jealous of the other that she would rather do without, herself, than share with her twin. It was disgraceful."

The twins leaned forward, charmed.

The doctor looked over his spectacles at them; there was no mistaking the effect he had produced. "Everybody warned them that unless they stopped squabbling, something dreadful would happen to them. But they never believed it till one day—"

The twins held their breath. Dr. Murchison went to the library and took out a book. He knew the value of a dramatic pause.

"—till one day they waked up in the morning and found that they were—stuck—fast—together—for life! Everything the dark one had

she just had to share with her twin. And everywhere she went her lazy blonde sister had to go, too. People made up a terrible name for them. They called them ''—he lowered his voice to the apologetic tone one has for not quite proper subjects—''the 'Siamese Twins,' and—if you don't believe me, here 's their picture!'' With a quick movement he opened the book before them.

The twins' faces went gray; in that second they even looked alike, so tense were both with the same emotion. Instinctively they made a swift motion, a dumb prayer for sympathy, toward each other; then as swiftly shuddered apart as though temporary contact might become lifelong bondage.

But as the months went by and they remained mercifully unattached (though battling still in their double capacity of Madigans and twins), they almost outgrew their credulity; yet still, on occasions, observed the morning ceremony of self-inspection.

In fact, though, nothing held them in peace together except sleep, when nature must have reunited them in dreams; for, no matter in what positions they were relatively when they closed their eyes, morning found their arms about each other, their breath intermingled,

their little bodies intercurved like well-packed sardines.

On their birthday morning—the twins were born on Christmas—Fom waked very early, alarmed to find Bep's arm about her. She never remembered in the morning that at night her last hazy thought had been to reach for it, pull down the sleeve of its nightgown, and cuddle close to her twin. She threw it from her now with unusual violence, and, sitting up in bed, slipped off her gown that she might closely examine her right side—the side that had been nearest Bep.

The blonde twin woke while this process was going on, and its dread significance shook the haze of slumber from her eyes. She, too, slipped her gown from her shoulders and, shivering with the cold, passed an apprehensive hand along her left ribs.

"Do you?" she whispered.

"N-no. I don't think so. I—I dreamed that it was there, though. Do you?"

An assenting shudder shook Bep's body.

"Where—oh, where? I don't believe it!" cried Fom. "You 're just a 'fraid-cat trying to frighten me."

Bep pointed to her side. There it was unmistakably—a round black-and-blue mark.

A wail escaped Florence. "Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" she cried, "what in the world shall we do?"

Bep did not answer. She sat stupefied, staring at the evidence of calamity.

"If it 's commenced on you, it 's bound to commence on me before long. I wonder—how fast it grows?"

Bep shook her head. "It was n't there when I went to sleep."

"If it grows on you toward me, and on me toward you that quick, why, in a week—we 'll be—stuck fast—won't we?"

Bep nodded miserably.

"Some morning," mourned Fom, wriggling unhappily, "we 'll wake and it 'll be all done. You 'll just have to study hard, Bessie Madigan, and be in my class in school; I won't go back into the mixed primary—I just won't! Oh, Bep, why will you put your arm around me at night?"

"I don't. I always go to sleep with my back to you. You know I do. And in the morning, the first thing I know you 're flinging my arm off. I believe you pull my arm over you yourself. I believe you want to get stuck together and be Chemise Twins!" Bep scolded tearfully, with her usual ill luck with unfamiliar words.

There was a sorrow-smitten pause.

"I say, Beppy," the termination was a sign of sudden good humor in Fom, "did n't you tumble down yesterday when you and Bombey Forrest were driving the Grayson kids round the block in your relay race?"

The light of hope leaped up in Bessie's eyes. "Could it be that?"

"Of course it could; it is, you silly!"

"I 'm not a silly. You were scared yourself," retorted the blonde twin, relieved but pugnacious.

"Pooh! I only pretended, to frighten you," jeered Fom.

"Not much you did n't. I ain't anybody's dope."

"Anybody's what?"

"Anybody's dope," answered Bep, uncertainly; she knew how little words were to be trusted.

"What 's 'dope'?" demanded Florence.

"Why—what Kate said yesterday."

An enjoying giggle came from Sissy's bed. She had waked. "*Dupe,* you goosy—*dupe!*" she chuckled.

"Yah! Yah!" sneered Fom, happy in her twin's discomfiture.

Bep blushed with mortification. "Don't

you trophy over me, Fom Madigan!'' she cried wrathfully.

Sissy's giggle became a shout of laughter, and straightway she sallied forth, benightgowned as she was, to carry the news of Bep's latest to the Madigans—while Bep, aware that she had Partingtoned again, without knowing just how, cried furiously after her: "I did n't say it! I did n't!''

Bep's talent was dear to the Madigans. They seized upon each blunder she made, and held it up, shrinking and bare, under the light of their laughter-loving eyes. They ridiculed it interminably, and were unflaggingly entertained by it, repeating it for the edification of each new-comer so often and so faithfully that from conscious mimicry they turned to use of it without quotation-marks, till, insensibly, at last it was received into their vocabulary—which fact, by the way, made the Madigan dialect at times difficult for strangers to master.

For instance, the rare rainy days in Nevada were always "glummy'' among Madigans, because the blonde twin had once been so affected by their gloom that she spelled it that way. An over-credulous person was a "sucher'' since the day she had written it so.

Jack Cody lived in the "vikinty" of their house, because Bep Partington had so decreed. "Don't greed" had become a classic since the day Aunt Anne issued her infamous ukase, compelling that twin who (wilfully speculating upon her sister's envy) kept goodies to the last to divide said last precious morsel with the gloating other. And the Madigan who (taking base advantage of the fact that Bep was at an age when to bite into a hard red winter apple was to leave a shaky tooth behind) obligingly took the first bite, but made that bite include nearly half the apple—that rapacious betrayer of confiding helplessness deserved to be called a harpy. But she was n't; she was known as "a regular harper!"

The Madigans trooped back into the twins' room in a body to "trophy" over Bep, whose double misfortune it was not only to be a Partington, but to strenuously deny her kinship with the family of that name. Bessie Madigan could not be got to admit that she had ever misused a word. And though the expressions she coined became part of Madigan history, though each piece was stamped undeniably by poor Bep her awkward mark, she never ceased insisting that they were counterfeit, issued for the express purpose of dis-

crediting her well-known familiarity with elegant English.

Yet she it was who had first miscalled her shadow a "shabby"; who had asked to be "merinded to merember," like her absent-minded Aunt Anne; and who had unconsciously parodied Split's passionate rendering of a line of the old song, "I feel his presence near" into "I feel his pleasant sneer"!

It was rarely that the Madigans could keep peace among themselves long enough to make an onslaught in a body. But when they did, the lone victim of their attack knew better than to struggle against her fate. Poor Bep, her protests borne down, all her old sins of diction raked up and, joined to the new ones, marshaled against her, became sulky. She turned her back upon the enemy and retreated to a corner to find out what Santa Claus and her own particular patron saint had to offer for the double celebration.

There was a dictionary from Kate—an added insult. But, to compensate, there was a whole orange from Aunt Anne, a bag of Chinese nuts from Wong, and from Split and Sissy (a separate donation from each) an undivided half-interest in the white kitten known as Spitfire.

When she had summed up the gifts of the gods to herself, Bep's eyes turned quickly to Fom's pile.

There was an assortment of hair-ribbons, more or less the worse for wear, from Kate, whose braids were coiled around her head these days. (Bep did n't envy her twin these, for the excellent reason that a back-comb was all that was necessary to keep her short blonde hair in order.) Then there was, from Sissy, a pen-wiper, whose cruelly twisted shape was a reflection of that needlewoman's agonies in its composition; upon it were embroidered figures and colors of things never seen on sea or land. (Fom might have that.) From Split—but Bep knew, of course, what there was from Split. Every year regularly, since the second of the Madigans had put away childish things, she had bestowed upon her faithful retainer her favorite doll Dora,—the large one, with waxen head and dark-brown tresses,—only to take it back at the first symptom of revolt, for a caprice, or merely to feel her power. She was an Indian giver, was Split. (Fom might have Dora, Bep said to herself, as long as she could keep her.)

But then Fom, too, had a large, fair, yellow orange and a bag of strange candies from Chinatown. As to these . . .

The twins must be pardoned, but circumstances had soured them. They had been cheated out of either a birthday or a Christmas —they had not decided which was the crueler wrong, so had not yet adopted and proclaimed their grievance. Besides this sorrow, each, by an interfering and unprovoked intrusion, had defrauded the other of the child's inalienable right to the center of the stage at least once a year. And when one remembers how crowded was the Madigan stage with jealous performers, any actor at all desirous of an opportunity must sympathize with them.

It was not etiquette for the twins to remember each other's birthday with a gift, one reason being that they were incapable of such a piece of hypocrisy. Another was that it would have seemed too like the rigid reciprocity of the Misses Blind-Staggers, whom it had been their custom to parody since the day they had been invited down to the cottage to see those ladies' strictly mutual Christmas presents. They played "From Maude to Etta" and " From Etta to Maude," as they called it; Fom handing to Bep, with great ceremony, a shoe, a stocking, or any other thing traveling in pairs, with the legend "From Maude to Etta," and receiving in return the mate of said shoe or stocking, " From Etta to Maude."

As for Francis Madigan, his daughters appreciated the fact that a girl's birthday could be looked upon only as a day of wrath and mourning; it came to be considered delicate, therefore, to mention the matter in his presence. Christmas, of course, was "nonsense" —a blanket term of disapproval behind which no one peered for reasons for its application.

On Miss Madigan anniversaries acted as a stimulant to an already sufficiently fecund pen. They awakened in her that sense of responsibility for her nieces' future, which nothing but an exceptionally heartrending letter of appeal for financial assistance for them could put comfortably to sleep again.

Out in the woodshed a disemboweled chest of drawers had been turned into an apartment-house for dolls. All the dolls that had dwelt in the Madigan family since Kate's babyhood (with the exception of Split's Dora, whom Fom, according to the preordained penchant of mothers, loved best because for her sake she suffered most) had descended to the twins.

On the top floor Mrs. Guy St. Gerald Clair lived with her husband and an only daughter. Mrs. Clair was an elegant matron, quite new,

a small blonde who could turn her head. Florence's skilful fingers kept this lady most beautifully gowned. And Split—whose favorite of the small-fry dolls she had once been—still remembered her fondly, and passed over to Fom the most wonderful patches. These she got from Jack Cody, the washerwoman's son, who bribed his mother by promises of good conduct to beg samples of their gowns from her aristocratic patrons.

Mr. Guy St. Gerald Clair was an unfortunate gentleman, tall, low-spirited, loose-jointed, with fixed blue eyes and knobby black hair. His melancholy, Bep was assured, was due to two things—the superiority of his wife in the matter of a movable head, and the impossibility of ever getting a pair of trousers that would come near to him in the seat and stay away from him at the ankle. Fom's theory—a hypothesis that enraged Bep—was that Mrs. Guy St. Gerald was the wealthy member of the family, and that her husband basely envied her her good fortune. She had a way, had Fom, of carrying on imaginary conversations with Mr. Clair upholding this idea, which made her twin long to rend her, and the doll too, limb from limb.

"Ah, Mr. Clair! Yes, thank you. Mrs.

Clair not in? . . . I 'm sorry. Gone off to Newport, has she, to sell her marble palace? What about the one on Fifth Avenue? . . . You don't say! Making it bigger? Well, well! And made a million in stocks, too. How delightful! You wish that you had some money —yes, I suppose—''

''He does not! He does not!'' The interruption came fiercely from Bep. ''You talk to your own doll and leave mine alone.''

''Pouf! If you 're afraid he 'll tell me how poor he is—''

''He ain't poor.''

''What does he wear such trousers for, then? Tell me that!''

Bep looked unutterable things at her twin. ''Just you make men's clothes for a while, Fom Madigan, and see how 't is yourself!'' she cried.

''Put Mrs. Clair in men's clothes?'' demanded Fom, purposely misunderstanding. ''I 'd like to see myself! The very richest lady in New York in men's clothes—why, you could get arrested for that!''

''I 'll change—'' began Bep, quickly.

''No, thank you. You could n't suit Mrs. Clair. She 's that particular about her things!''

"Well, just the same, I won't make men's clothes any more." Bep rolled her head threateningly.

"Going to let Mr. Clair go naked?" inquired Fom, pleasantly. "He 'll have to be sent to the poorhouse, then."

"He sha'n't! He 'll go to bed sick first, and then Mrs. Clair 'll just have to stay home in an old wrapper and nurse him."

"No; she 'll take Anita and go off to the country. . . . Are you so sick, Mr. Clair?" began Fom, while her slower twin danced with apprehension of the outcome of this one-sided dialogue. "I 'm awful sorry. Smallpox? Oh, how dreadful! And that 's why Mrs. Clair and Anita have gone—"

"'T ain't! 'T ain't smallpox! 'T ain't! 'T ain't! 'T ain't!" Bep hopped about on one foot in her excitement.

"How do you know?" asked Fom, calmly. "Are you the doctor?"

The doctor lived in the flat below. He was a ready-dressed gentleman, still stylish if a bit seedy, and his large family overflowed down into the next two shelves. He was summoned.

"I have called you, doctor,"—began Fom.

"I 've sent for you, doctor,"—interrupted Bep.

"Well!" exclaimed Fom, stiffly, "I think you might be polite enough to let Mrs. Clair speak to the doctor about her own husband."

"What 's she going to say?" demanded Bep.

"How should I know?" asked Fom, airily; and then, hurrying on, while she made Mrs. Clair bow low before the ready-made physician, "I am Mrs. Clair, doctor, the rich Mrs. Guy St. Gerald Clair who has all the money—"

"It 's no such thing! It 's no such thing!" shrieked Bep.

"Well, Miss Florence Madigan!" exclaimed Mrs. Clair by proxy, "if your sister Bessie ain't the rudest!"

"I 'll smash her if she says that again!" came in a bellow from Bep.

"You touch my doll!" Daringly Fom placed Mrs. Clair within tempting distance of Bep's hand.

"Well—just you let her say it again!"

"I don't need to. She 's told me, so now I know it."

"You may go down-stairs again, doctor. It 's a mistake," said Bep, addressing the medical man. (The twins always tried to keep up appearances before their dolls.) "Mr. Clair —the awfully rich Mr. Guy St. Gerald Clair—is not sick at all. But you can send your bill

to him anyway, he won't care. It must have been some poor relation of Mrs. Clair's—she did n't have a dress to her name before she married, you know."

"Oh—oh! Bessie Madigan!"

"Well, she did n't," said Bep, stoutly.

"I 'll bet you—I 'll bet you a shut-up. There!" Cautious Fom rarely hazarded so great a stake; but she felt that the occasion demanded something adequate.

"All right; I 'll leave it to Sissy." It was from Sissy that Bep had inherited Mr. Clair. She would know.

Laying down stiff all-china Anita Clair, whose shoes she was painting red to match her sash, Bep followed her twin into the house.

But the omnivorous Sissy was reading "The Boys of England"—a thing Sissy loved to do; for it was a magazine not permitted to enter Mrs. Pemberton's immaculate house, a recommendation in itself, and, besides, Split, to whom Jack Cody had loaned it, was doubtless looking all over for it at this very moment. Lying luxuriously flat upon the floor and eating chocolate, Sissy had just got to that part where Jack Harkaway "with one flash of Abu Hadji's ruby-incrusted simitar decapitated the unfortunate Arab, and Dick Lightheart, seizing

the bewitching Haidee, had mounted his horse" —when the belligerent twins found her.

"Now, let me say it," began Fom.

"No; you won't ask it fair. . . . Sissy, tell me, was n't Mr.—"

"Tra—la—la—la!" sang Fom, shrilly, drowning Bep's voice.

"Say!" Sissy looked up. Her cheeks were flaming with excitement, for any bit of print, however crude, had the power to move her as reality could not. At eleven she shivered and glowed over pseudo-sentiment, while a tragedy in the mine—whose tall chimneys she could see from her window—was as intangibly distant and irrelevant as weekly statistics of the superintendent's mining reports.

Her juniors harkened respectfully; but neither would permit the other to ask the question, for fear of its revealing the nature of the answer hoped for. So they withdrew for a period, returning with the following query, which Bep allowed Fom to put, so sure was she of the response:

"Did or did not Mrs. Clair ever have a dress before she married Mr. Clair?"

To this the oracle gave answer:

She did not, for how could she, she being Mr. Clair's second wife; his first, an accomplished

lady, but all-solid china, having fallen from the top story of the apartment-house and smashed herself into bits, and the widower having himself accompanied Sissy and Split to the shop to select her successor, whose first gown was, of course, a heavy mourning robe.

Bep heaved a deep sigh of content. She ran back to the woodshed so relieved that, although she had won a valuable shut-up, she did not care to "trophy" in her victory. Fom followed. But her grief for Mrs. Clair was bitterer even than her own disappointment.

"I want the Smith twins," she said stiffly, when they got back to the dolls' sky-scraper. And Bep understood.

The Smith twins were an invention of technical Fom's that had become an institution with herself and her playmate. Two tiny china dolls dressed in baby long clothes (the better to hide the fact that they were legless), the one with pink, the other with a blue sash, were brought up from the lowest story, where broken-nosed Mrs. Smith lived with her family of cripples.

They were dolls of bad omen, these two, but following instead of prophesying a storm. When it became absolutely necessary for one Madigan twin to be "mad" at the other, and

yet that the business of playing be uninterrupted, the Smith twins invariably made their appearance. They were supposed to save one's dignity; in reality, they lent piquancy to games and rendered "making up" delightful.

Occasionally Bep and Fom did disown each other and adopt a chum from the outside world. One Beulah, known as " Bombey," Forrest was always ready obligingly to serve either or both of them in the capacity of dearest friend. But other playmates were tame after being accustomed to a Madigan; and each twin was so jealously afraid of the other's having a good time without her that she spent most of the period of estrangement trying to spy out what the other and her interloping companion were doing.

The Smith twins were easier.

"Tell Bep," said Florence to the pink-sashed small Smith, "that I think she 's a nasty mean thing, and Mrs. Clair 'll never forgive her."

"Tell Fom," returned Bep, with spirit, putting the blue-sashed Smith baby in her pocket as a sort of emergency battery, so that the wires of communication might be set up at any time between her twin and herself, "that I

don't care a 'article for what she thinks. And Mrs. Clair's nothing but a beggar. I wonder that Mr. Clair married her!''

The war was on.

Down on the dump, that fascinating mountain of soft, glittering waste rock, the godless twins went to dig on Christmas afternoon. The mining operations were elaborate that they projected there, particularly after Jack Cody's brother Peter joined them. While Peter was rigging up windlasses with pieced-out cord, Fom, with a couple of tin cups purloined from Wong's kitchen, brought up the rock, piling it in miniature dumps at the mouth of their shaft. Bep's awkward fingers could be trusted only with the preliminary scooping out of the ground where a new shaft was to be sunk.

''Tell Fom,'' she said to the blue-sashed Smith twin in her pocket, ''that I want the scooper; my hands are all sore.''

''Tell Bep,'' returned Fom, quickly, ''that she can't have it till Pete an' I get through running our drift.''

The excuse did not seem legitimate to Bep, whose grimy hands ached to the finger-tips from being used as both pick and shovel. She made a dart for the ''scooper''—a heavy china

cup which had been smashed in so fortunate a manner as to be ideally fitted for emptying ore by hand.

But Fom was slim, and quick as a cat. She threw herself bodily upon both scooper and pick—the latter an old fork with but one tine left. Bep promptly threw herself on top of her twin, while Peter, a laconic lad, calmly set himself to rehabilitating the hind wheel of a battered tin toy express which served as a dump-cart.

"Little folks should n't quarrel," suddenly said a slow voice above the struggling arms and legs of the twins.

Fom looked up, still pressing her body hard against the tools in dispute, while Bep got to her feet, red-faced and panting. "We 're not quarreling," said Florence, calmly.

Superintendent Warren Pemberton, still in his oilskins from a trip down the mine, looked down at her and gasped. He did not know the Madigan brunette twin, and actually thought she was lying. But Fom was never known to lie; she only pettifogged.

"You 're not quarreling!"

"Nope."

"Did n't I see you with my own eyes?" he demanded, piqued.

"People don't see people quarreling," said Fom, didactically. "They hear them."

"Oh, that 's it! Well, did n't I hear—"

"No, you did n't; for we 're mad and don't speak to each other."

"But you 're not quarreling?"

"Nope," repeated Fom, stoutly, "we 're not."

Mr. Pemberton shook his head helplessly. "What are you doing?"

"I 'm running a drift"—Fom misunderstood the drift of his question—"from the Silver King to the Diamond Heart, and the earth keeps coming down. Then Bep tries to make it harder by grabbing for the tools and—"

"Why don't you timber?" suggested Pemberton, gravely.

" 'Cause I don't have to," answered Fom, quite as seriously.

"Oh, you don't!" Pemberton, a man with no sense of humor, had been unusually expansive; but he shrank angrily into himself now, as though from a cold douche. It took some time for one to get accustomed to Fom's way of instructing authorities upon the subjects which they were supposed to know most about.

"No, that 's silly," remarked Fom, superbly. "If the ground 's sticky enough, and

you 're not butter-fingered,''—with an insulting glance at Bep,—''you can manage all right.''

''But I 'm not butter-fingered and I always timber.'' Warren Pemberton was a slow man, but a dogged one; the elusiveness of this pert child irritated him.

''That 's 'cause you don't know any better,'' came from the expert, who had returned to her task, the excited flourishes of her uplifted legs betraying its difficulties.

''You 're a little fool!'' declared the superintendent. ''Do you know who I am? My name 's Pemberton, and I—''

''Why don't you make your wife leave Crosby alone, then?'' demanded Fom, without seeming much impressed.

Warren Pemberton looked down upon her little body with an expression that made Bep wonder why he refrained from stamping upon it.

''You don't think Mrs. Pemberton knows her business, either?'' His ruddy, full face looked apoplectic.

''Nope. Sissy says if she was Crosby she 'd run away to sea. And she 's going to put him up to it, too, if—''

But Bep, frightened by the growing anger in

the great man's face, interposed. "Shall I shut her up for you, Mr. Pemberton?" she asked.

"What—what d' ye say? I wish to God you would, or that somebody could!"

"Fom," said Bep, authoritatively, "shut up!"

Fom jumped to her feet. There was appeal, wrath, rebellion in her crimson face. She opened her lips as if to protest.

"Shut up, Fom," repeated Bep, distinctly. "I said *shut up.*"

There came a deadly silence. Pemberton, in the act of stalking ill-temperedly away, turned bewildered to regard the miracle.

"Say," asked Peter Cody, driven to speech by curiosity. "Say, Fom, do you let your sister boss you like that? I thought you was twins."

Fom looked appealingly at Bep. If Bep would but explain the nature of a shut-up—its power of suddenly depriving one of speech; of making one temporarily dumb in the very midst of a sentence, at the bidding of the winner of a wager, whenever, wherever the caprice to collect the debt of honor occurred to her!

But Bep, after accompanying Mr. Pemberton a few steps, striving to untell him what Fom had betrayed, turned her attention again

to mining matters. She knew well what Fom's eyes begged, but hid her head in the Silver King, whence a subterranean giggle came, revealing her enjoyment of the situation.

Fom's stormy eyes filled and the Silver King and the Diamond Heart jigged back and forth till the tears splashed down and cleared her vision.

"Ho—cry-baby!" called Peter Cody. Peter was one of those gallant gentlemen who are never afraid of a playmate when some one else has demonstrated that he can be downed.

At the taunt, a revengeful passion seized Fom, standing there—a lingual Samson shorn of her tongue, two dirty channels plowed down her cheeks by her tears. Deliberately lifting her foot, she brought it down, stamping with all her might again and again.

The soft, loosely packed earth slid smoothly down. The Diamond Heart caved in completely, the almost finished connecting tunnel was a wreck, and the still rolling, moist gravel swept over Bep's head, filling up the Silver King clear to the surface.

By the time Peter had realized their utter ruin, and Bep had shaken the particles of sand and gravel from her hair and ears and throat, Fom was nowhere in sight.

"Let 's kill her," suggested Bep.

"Shall we?" asked Peter, with an air of stern justice.

They debated the question, fully realizing the make-believe of it, yet taking pleasure in at least the mention of revenge.

Suddenly Bep gave a cry of triumph and picked up something from the ground.

"What is it?" asked Peter.

"It 's Fom's doll. It must have dropped out of her pocket when she was digging and sassing Mr. Pemberton. We 'll play there 's been an accident,—a cave in the mine,—and the doll 'll be buried alive down there. Would n't Fom howl?"

She rolled up her sleeve and thrust a round arm far down in the clean, moist gravel, leaving the poor Smith twin in the murderous depths of the Silver King. Then both set to work. Poor Fom, half-way down the dump, beside the mysterious "flush" of seething, boiling, foaming waste water, whose tide went low or high with the breathing of the great mine, heard a laugh or a whistle now and then; and a miserable feeling of loneliness oppressed her. But she lay there sobbing quietly, while on top the valiant rescuers emptied the mines, carried on conversations with the entombed

men, and at last, with a fine pretense of amazement and grief, discovered the dead miner. Reverently he was borne to the surface, Bep holding the bucket steady while Peter wound the cord. And then they buried the unfortunate man. There was an imposing funeral, and the three-wheeled dump-cart was filled with imaginary mourners. At the grave hymns were sung by Bep, when she could be spared from mourner's duties, and a prayer by Peter concluded the impressive services.

It had been Fom's intention to lie there half-way down the dump till she died of hunger—when Bep would be sorry for her cruel treatment. The self-pitying tears were in Florence's eyes as she thought out the details of Bep's grief, and the unanimous reprobation of the family for the bad blonde twin. But she grew hungrier and hungrier, and at last resolved to go home to lunch.

First, though, she would see how much damage she had done in her short-lived anger, for her heart was sore when she thought how proud they two had been of their mines. She scrambled to the top. There was the new shaft, the Tomboy, almost completed. The Diamond Heart was in working order. Peter's dexterous fingers had triumphed over the shifting

rock, and he had modestly taken a hint as to timbering from Warren Pemberton. The tunnel was an accomplished fact, while over the frail hoisting-works of the Silver King a tiny flag—a corner torn from Bep's handkerchief —fluttered at half-mast.

THE ANCESTRY OF IRENE

THE ANCESTRY OF IRENE

IN her heart Irene was confident that, though among the Madigans, she was not of them. The color of her hair, the shape of her nose, the tempestuousness of her disposition, the difficulty she experienced in fitting her restless and encroaching nature into what was merely one of a number of jealously frontiered interstices in a large family—all this forbade tame acceptance on her part of so ordinary and humble an origin as Francis Madigan's fatherhood connoted.

"No," she said firmly to herself the day she and Florence were see-sawing in front of the woodshed after school, "he 's only just my foster-father; that 's all."

How this foster-father—she loved the term, it sounded so delightfully haughty—had obtained possession of one whose birthright would place her in a station so far above his own, she had not decided. But she was convinced that, although poor and peculiar and incapable

of comprehending the temperament and necessities of the nobly born, he was, in his limited way, a worthy fellow. And she had long ago resolved that when her real father came for her, she would bend graciously and forgivingly down from her seat in the carriage, to say good-by to poor old Madigan.

"Thank you very, very much, Mr. Madigan," she would sweetly say, "for all your care. My father, the Count, will never forget what you have done for his only child. As for myself, I promise you that I will have an eye upon your little girls. I am sure his Grace the Duke will gladly do anything for them that I recommend. I am very much interested in little Florence, and shall certainly come for her some day in my golden chariot to take her to my castle for a visit, because she is such a well-behaved child and knew me, in her childish way, for a noble lady in disguise. Cecilia? Which one is that? Oh, the one her sisters call Sissy! She needs disciplining sadly, Mr. Madigan, sadly. Much as he loves me, my father, the Prince, would not care to have me know her—as she is now. But she will improve, if you will be very, very strict with her. Good-by! Good-by, all! No, I shall not forget you. Be good and obey your aunty. Good-by!"

The milk-white steeds would fly down the steep, narrow, unpaved streets. On each side would stand the miners, bowing, hat in hand, hurrahing for the great Emperor and his beautiful daughter—she who had so strangely lived among them under the name of Split Madigan. They would speak, realizing now, of certain royal traits they had always noted in her—her haughty spirit that never brooked an insult, her independence, her utter fearlessness, the reckless bravery of a long line of kings, and—and even that very disinclination for study which they had stupidly fancied indicated that Sissy Madigan was her superior! What would Princess Irene want with vulgar fractions, a common denominator, and such low subjects?

"What makes you wrinkle up your nose that way, Split?" Florence's voice broke in complainingly on her sister's reverie. She glanced up the incline of the see-saw to the height whence Irene looked down, physically as well as socially, upon her faithful retainer and the straggling little town.

Irene did not answer. She was busy dreaming, and her dreams were of the turned-up-nose variety.

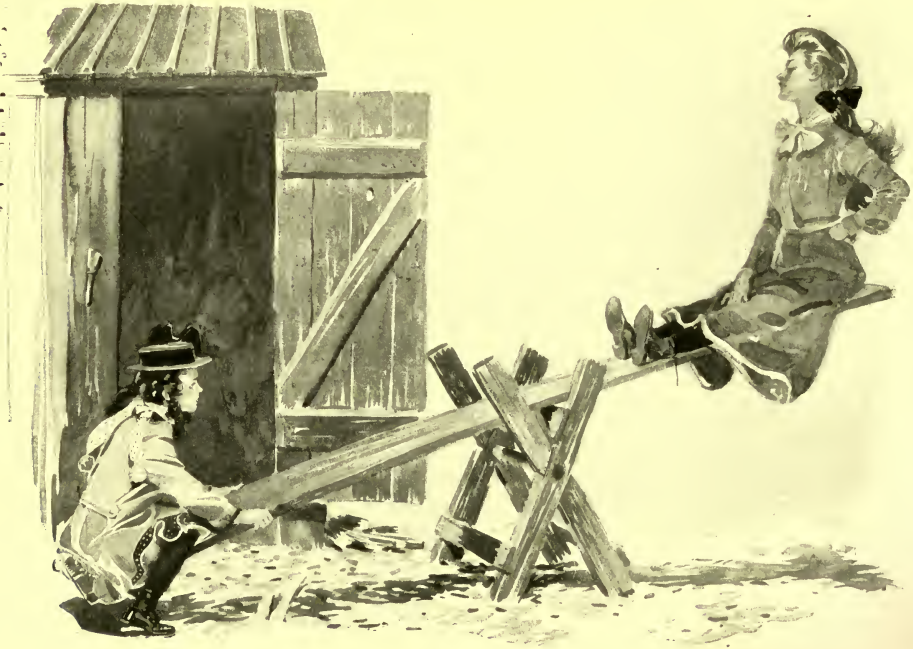
"Don't, Split! It makes you look like a

—what Sissy just now called you.'' The smaller sister's eyes fell, as though seeking corroboration from the middle of the board, where Sissy had been so lately acting as ''candlestick''—lately, for the incident had ended (no game being enticing enough to hold these two long in an unnatural state of neutrality) in Split's washing Sissy's face vigorously in the snow, and Sissy's calling her elder sister ''nothing but an old Indian!'' as she ran weeping into the house with the familiar parting threat to get even before bedtime. No Madigan could bear that the sun should set on her wrath; she preferred that all scores should be paid off, so that the slate might be clean for to-morrow's reckonings.

''Fom,'' said her big sister, slowly, when she was quite ready to speak, ''I think you 'd better call me 'Irene.' You 'd feel gladder about it when I 'm gone.''

''Where?'' At this minute it was Fom's turn to be dangerously high, and she wriggled to the uttermost end of the plank to counterbalance her sister's weight.

A mysterious smile overspread Irene's face. It became broadly triumphant as she rose presently on the short end of the board, her arms daringly outspread, her toes upturned in front



"She glanced up the incline of the see-saw to the height whence Irene looked down"

of her, her agile body well balanced, her spirit exulting in the sense of danger without and superiority within.

"When?" asked Florence, with that amiable readiness to consider a question unasked, so becoming to the vassal. "When are you going?"

"To-night—maybe." Her own words startled Irene. She loved to play upon Fom's fears, but she had not really intended committing herself so far. "He may call for me to-night," she added, with qualifying emphasis.

"Who? Not—not—"

"Yes, my father. I must be ready at any time, you know."

Fom looked alarmed. She had heard long ago and in strict confidence about Split's lofty parentage. She had even accepted drafts upon her future, rendering services which were unusual in a Madigan fag, with the understanding that when the Princess Split should come into her own, she would richly repay. But she had never before heard her speak so positively or set a time when their relationship must cease.

A feeling of utter loneliness came over Split's faithful ally. She saw the balance of power in the Madigan oligarchy rudely disturbed. She beheld, in a swift, dread vision, the undisputed supremacy of the party of Sissy.

Dismay entered her soul and shook her body, for with the brunette of the twins emotion and action were synonymous. "Oh, don't go, Split!" she begged, squirming unhappily at her end of the plank. "Don't go!"

High up in the air, Split smiled superbly. There was *noblesse oblige* in that smile; also the strong teasing tincture which no Madigan could resist using, even upon her closest ally.

"Oh, Split—o-o-oh, Split!" wailed Fom, forgetting in her wriggling misery how close she already was to the end of the plank.

A crash and a bump and a squeal told it to her all at once. She had slid clear off, getting an instantaneous effect of her haughty sister unsupported at a dizzy eminence, before Split came bumping down to earth, the see-saw giving that regal head a parting, stunning tap as the long end finally settled down and the short one went up to stay.

It was never in the ethics of Madigan warfare to explain the inexplicable. Florence was on her feet, flying as though for her very life, before Split, shaken down from her dreams, quite realized what had happened. And she was still sitting as she had fallen when Jim, the Indian, came for the sawbuck.

Jim limped, his eyes were sore and watery, and it took him two weeks to conquer the Madigan woodpile, which any other Piute in town could have leveled in half the time.

"Him fall, eh?" he asked, dismantling the see-saw with that careful leisureliness that accounted for the Chinaman Wong's contempt for Indians.

"Not him; *her,* Jim."

Split possessed a passion for imparting knowledge, of which she had little, and which was hard for her to attain.

Jim grinned.

"She no got little gal like you teach her Inglis," he said, gently apologetic.

"Not she, Jim; *he.* How old is your little girl?" Split remembered that a genteel interest in the lower classes is becoming to the well-born.

"He just big like you," Jim responded mournfully, drawing the back of his brown hand across his nose. "But he all gone."

"Dead?" Split crossed her legs uneasily as she squatted, and lowered her voice reverently.

"He no dead," Jim said, lifting the sawbuck and easing it on his shoulder. "One Washoe squaw steal him—little papoose, nice little pa-

poose. Much white—like you, missy. So white, squaw say no sure Injun."

"Jim!"

"Take him down Tluckee valley. Take him 'way. Jim see squaw one day long time 'go —Washoe Lake—shoot ducks. Heap shoot squaw. He die, but he say white Faginia man got papoose."

"Jim!" It was the faintest echo of the first terrified exclamation.

"Come Faginia, look papoose. No find. Chop wood long time. Heap hogady—not much dinner. Nice papoose—white, like you."

Jim paused. He expected sympathy, but he hoped for dinner. When he saw he was to get neither, he hunched his lame hip, scratched his head, balanced the sawbuck, and shuffled away.

Too overcome to move, Split sat looking after him. Her father! This, then, was her father! She was dazed, helpless, too overwhelmed even to be unhappy yet.

There came a shrill call for her from Kate, and Split, with unaccustomed meekness, staggered obediently to her feet. What was left for her but to be a slave, she said stonily to herself. She was an Indian like—like her father! And Sissy had noticed the resemblance that very afternoon!

"It 's the bell, Split," explained Kate, who was reading "The Spanish Gypsy" in the low, hall-like library.

She had begun to read the book for the reason that no one in her class at school had read it —usually a compelling reason for the eldest of the Madigans; but the poetic beauty, the extravagance of the romance, had whirled the girl away from her pretentious pose, and she was finishing it now because she could not help it; chained to it, it seemed to her, till she should know the end.

" Shall I go? " asked Split, humbly, looking up at her sister.

Kate looked up, too surprised by her sister's docility to do anything but nod. She had anticipated a battle, a ring at the door-bell being the signal for a flying wedge of Madigans tearing through the hall, with inquisitive Irene at its apex—except when she was asked to answer it.

The sisters' eyes met: those of the elder, in her thin, dark, flushed face, hazy with romantic happiness; those of the younger bright with romantic suffering, demanding a share of that felicity which transfigured her senior.

"What 're you reading, anyway, Kate?" she asked.

As well tap the bung of a cask and ask what it holds. Kate began chanting:

"'Father, your child is ready! She will not
Forsake her kindred: she will brave all scorn
Sooner than scorn herself. Let Spaniards all,
Christians, Jews, Moors, shoot out the lip and say,
"Lo, the first hero in a tribe of thieves!"
Is it not written so of them? They, too,
Were slaves, lost, wandering, sunk beneath a curse,
Till Moses, Christ, and Mahomet were born,
Till beings lonely in their greatness lived,
And lived to save their people.'"

It poured from Kate's lips, the story of the lady Fedalma and her Gipsy father, a stream of winy romance, a sugared impossibility preserved in the very spirits of poetry.

Again the old bell jangled, and again. Kate was glutted, drunk with the sound of the verbal music that had been chorusing behind her lips; while for Irene every word seemed charged with the significance of special revelation. The light seemed to leap from her sister's eyes to kindle a conflagration in her own.

"Read it again—that part—Kate! Read it!" she cried.

And Kate, not a bit loath, turned the page and repeated:

"'Lay the young eagle in what nest you will,
The cry and swoop of eagles overhead
Vibrate prophetic in its kindred frame,
And make it spread its wings and poise itself
For the eagle's flight.'"

Split breathed again, a full, deep breath of satisfaction. An Indian—she, Split Madigan? Perhaps; but an Indian princess, then, with a mission as great, glorious, and impossible as Fedalma's own.

When at last she did turn mechanically to answer the bell, she saw that Sissy had anticipated her and was showing old Professor Trask into the parlor. Ordinarily Irene loved to listen at the door while Sissy's lesson was in progress; for Trask was a nervous, disappointed wreck, whose idea of teaching music seemed to be to make his pupils as much like himself as harried youth can be like worried age. But on this great day the joy of hearing the perfect Sissy rated had not the smallest place in her enemy's thoughts. A poet's words had lifted Irene in an instant from child hell to heaven, had fired her imagination, had rekindled her pride, had given back her dreams.

Reality was not altogether so pleasant, she found, when she went into the kitchen, skirmished with the Chinese cook for Jim's dinner,

and went out to the woodpile to give it to him herself.

She did not wait to see him eat it—she was not poet enough for that; and, that impersonal, composite father, her tribe, was calling her.

Pulling on her hood and jacket, with her mittens dangling from a red tape on each side, she flew out and down the long, rickety stairs which a former senator from Nevada had built up the mountain's side, when he planned for his home a magnificent view of the mountains and desert off toward the east.

Split did not look at either, though they shone, the one like a billowy moonlit sea, the other like a lake of silver, because of the snow that covered them. She half ran, half slid down the hilly street till she came to a box-like miner's cabin, where Jane Cody, the washerwoman, lived with her son. In front of it she halted and called imperiously:

"Jack!"

For this same Jack was her own, her discovery, her possession, who acknowledged her thrall and was proud of it.

But the green shutters over the one window remained fast, and the door tight closed.

"Jack?" There was a suggestion of incredulity in Split's voice.

"'I want you—come!' the Indian princess announced"

The whistles burst forth in a medley of throaty roars (it was five-o'clock "mining-time"), but the bird-like whistle of Jack was missing.

"Jack Cody!" Split stamped her high arctics in the snow.

The door was opened a little, and a round black head was cautiously thrust forth.

"I want you—come!" the Indian princess announced. "And get your sled."

"I can't," replied the head.

"But I want you."

The head wagged dolefully.

"Why not?"

The head hung down.

"Tell me."

The head's negative was sorrowful but determined.

"If you don't tell me I 'll—never speak to you again 's long as I live, Jack Cody!"

The head stretched out its long neck and sent an agonized glance toward her.

"Tell me—right now!" she commanded.

"Well—she 's took my clothes with her," wailed the head, and jerked itself within, while the door was slammed behind it.

Split walked up the stoop.

"Jack," she called, her mouth at the keyhole,

"who took 'em? Your mother? Why? But she can't keep you in that way. Never mind. What *have* you got on?"

The door was opened an inch or two, and the head started to look out. But at sight of Split so near it withdrew in such turtle-like alarm that she laughed aloud.

"What 're you laughing at?" growled the boy.

"What 's that you got on?" said she.

"My—my mother's wrapper."

A peal of laughter burst from the Indian princess. But it ceased suddenly. For the door was thrown open with such violence that it made Jane Cody's wax flowers shake apprehensively under their glass bell, and a figure stalked out such as might haunt a dream —long, gaunt, awkward, inescapably boyish, yet absurdly feminine, now that the dark calico wrapper flapped at its big, awkward heels and bound and hindered its long legs.

Split looked from the heavily shod feet to the round, short-shaven black head, and a premonitory giggle shook her.

"Don't you laugh—don't you dare laugh at me! Don't you, Split—will you?" The phrases burst from him, a threat at the beginning, an appeal at the end.

"No," said Split, choking a bit; "no, I won't. You don't look very—" she gulped—"very funny, Jack. And it 's getting so dark that nobody 'd know—really they would n't."

"Sure?"

Split nodded.

"Get your sled quick, the big, long one, the leg-breaker, and take me down—I'll tell you where. Get it, won't you?"

"In this, this—like this?" Jack faltered.

"It 's so important, Jack. Please! It 's always you that asks me, remember."

The boy threw his hands out with a gesture that strained the narrow garment he wore almost to bursting. He began to talk, to argue, to plead; then suddenly he yielded, and turned and ran, a grotesque, long-legged shape, toward the back of the house.

When he whistled, Split joined him, and together they plowed their way through the high snow to the beaten-down street beyond. At the top of the hill, Split sat down well to the front of the low, rakish-looking leg-breaker. Behind her the boy, hitching up his skirts, threw himself with one knee bent beneath him, and, with a skilful ruddering of the other long, untrousered leg, started the sled.

They had coasted only half a block—Virginia

City runs downhill—when they heard the shrill yelp of the Comstock boy on the trail of his prey. As Jack stopped the sled a swift volley of snowballs from a cross-street struck the figure of a tall, timid, stooping man in an old-fashioned cape, such as no Comstock boy had ever seen on anything masculine.

"It 's Professor Trask," breathed Irene, keen delight in persecution lending to her aggressive, bright face that savage sharpness of feature which Sissy Madigan called Indian. "Don't you wish you had n't got that dress on, Jack?" she asked, as the tall, black mark for a good shot still stood hesitating to cross the polished, steep street, down which many sleds had slipped for days past. "You could get him every time, could n't you?"

Despite the ignoble garment that cramped it, the boy's breast swelled with pride in his lady's approval.

"You could just fire one at him from here, anyway," suggested Irene, adaptable as her sex is to contemporary standards and customs.

"Ye-es," said the boy, hesitating; "but he 's such a poor old luny."

Split turned her imperial little hooded head questioningly.

"He is—really luny," said the boy, apologet-

"They had coasted only half a block"

ically. "Since his little girl wandered away one day from home and never came back, he gets spells, you know. He was telling ma one day when she went over to do his washing. But—but I will land one on him if you want, Split."

But Split had suddenly pivoted clear around and sat now facing him, an eager, mittened hand staying his hard, skilful, obedient fingers, already making the snowball.

"How—how old would that little girl be, Jack?" she gasped.

"Why, 'bout twelve—thirteen. Why?"

"And what would be the color of her hair?"

"Red, I s'pose, like his; not—not like yours —Split," he added shyly, glancing at the brown fire of the curls that escaped from her hood.

But Irene was no longer listening. She was looking over to the other side of the street, where that shrinking, pitiable old figure in its threadbare neatness trembled; not daring to seek safety across the dangerously smooth street, nor daring to remain exposed here, where it ducked ridiculously every now and then to avoid the whizzing balls that sang about it.

Irene breathed hard. A coward for a father, a scarecrow, a butt for a gang of miners' boys! This, this was her father! Why, even crippled

old Jim, the wood-chopper, seen in retrospect and haloed by copper-colored dreams of romantic rehabilitation—even Jim seemed regrettable.

But she did not hesitate, any more than Fedalma did. She, too, knew a daughter's duty—to a hitherto unknown, just-discovered father. A merely ordinary, every-day parent like Francis Madigan was, as a matter of course, the common enemy, and no self-respecting Madigan would waste the poetry of filial feeling upon any one so realistic.

"You wait for me here, Jack," she said, with unhesitating reliance upon his obedience.

"Where 're you going? I thought you were in a hurry to get down to the wickiups."

She did not hear him. She had spun off the sled, and with the sure-footed speed of the hill-child she was crossing the street.

Old Trask, his short-sighted eyes blinking beneath his twitching, bushy red eyebrows, looked down as upon a miracle when a red-mittened hand caught his and he heard a confident voice—the clear voice children use to enlighten the stupidity of adults:

"I 'll help you across; take my hand."

"Eh—what?"

He leaned down, failing to recognize her.

Children had no identity to him. They were merely brats, he used to say, unless they happened to have some musical aptitude. But he accepted her aid, his battered old hat rocking excitedly upon his high bony forehead, as he ducked and turned and shivered at the oncoming balls. "Bad boys—bad boys!" he ejaculated. "Boys are the devil!"

"Yes," agreed Split, craftily. "Girls are best. Your little girl, now—father—" she began softly.

"Eh—what?" he exclaimed. "Who's your father? My respects to him."

"I have no father," she answered softly. A plan had sprung full-born from her quick brain. She would win this erratic father back to memory of his former life and her place in it—somewhat as did one Lucy Manette, a favorite heroine of Split's that Sissy had read about and told her of. That would be a fine thing to do—almost as fine, and requiring the center of the stage as much, as rehabilitating the Red Man.

"I have no father," she murmured, "if you won't be mine."

"What? What? No!" Trask was across now and brushing the snowy traces of battle from his queer old cape. "No; I don't want any children. I had one once—a daughter."

Split's heart beat fast.

"She was a brat, with the temper of a little fiend, and no ear—absolutely none—for music; played like an elephant."

How terribly confirmatory!

"And what—what became of her?" whispered Split.

"She ran away two years ago and—"

"Two years!"

"I said two, did n't I?" demanded the old professor, irascibly.

Disgusted, Split turned her back on him. Why, two years ago Sissy had first called her an Indian; how right she had been! Two years ago she, Split, was making over all her dolls to Fom. Two years ago she had already discovered Jack Cody's fleet strength, his wonderful aptness at making swift sleds, in which her reckless spirit reveled, his mastership of other boys of his gang, and—her mastery of him.

She turned and beckoned to him. His sweet whistle rang out in answer like a vocal salute, and in a moment she was seated again in front of him, with that deft, tail-like left leg of his steering them down, down over cross-street, through teams and sleighs and unwary pedestrians; past the miners coming off shift; past the lamplighter making his rounds in the crisp,

clear cold of the evening; past the heavy-laden squaws, with their bowed heads, their papooses on their backs, their weary arms bearing home the spoils of a hard day's work, and the sore-eyed yellow dogs trudging, too, wearily and dejectedly at their heels, toward the rest of the wickiup and the acrid warmth of the sage-brush camp-fire.

In short, swift sentences, as they hurdled over artificially raised obstructions, or slid along the firm-packed snow, or grated on the muddy cross-streets, Princess Split told her plan—with reservations. She was not prepared to admit to so humble a worshiper the secret of her birth, but the magnanimous self-sacrifice of a beautiful nature, the heroine concealed beneath a frivolous exterior—these she was willing Jack Cody should suspect and admire.

"We 'll lift them up, you and I, Jack. I 'm going 'to—to be the angel of a homeless tribe,' or something like that," she quoted, as it grew darker and the sled slowed down a bit, where the slant of the hill-street became gentler and she need not hold on tight. "You 'll be their general and I their princess. You 'll teach them to be fine soldiers, so that the people in town will be afraid of them and have to give them back their lands—and the mines, too. They 're

theirs, and they shall have them and be millionaires. And, of course, so will we. We 'll own all the stocks and brokers' offices, and after a few years, when they 're quite civilized, we 'll come up to town to live. We 'll take Bob Graves's 'Castle' and—Jack! Ah!"

A long scream burst from her. Never in her life had Split Madigan screamed like that. For an incredibly fleet instant she actually saw above her head a struggling horse's hoofs. In the next, her calico-wrappered knight had thrown himself and his lady out into the great drifts on the side. Split felt the cold fleeciness of new-fallen snow on her face, down her neck, up her sleeves. She was smothered, drowned in it, when with another tug the boy whirled her to her feet, and swaying unsteadily, she looked up into the face of the man whose horses had so nearly crushed her life out.

It was her father—she knew it was. Else why had fate so strangely thrown them together? Yes, this was her true father. No other girl's father could have so handsome a fur coat as that reaching from the tips of this very tall man's ears to his heels. No other could have a sleigh so fine, and silver-belled horses fit for a king. No other could have such bright brown

eyes beneath heavy sandy brows, such red, red cheeks, and so long and silver-white a beard which the sun could still betray into confession of its youthful ruddiness. What if he did have, too, a brogue so soft, so wheedling that men had long called him Slippery Uncle Sammy?

Split waked with a humiliating start from her lesser, less genteel dreams. Of course this bonanza king driving up from the mine was her real father, and she a bonanza princess, happier, more fortunate than a merely political one; for princesses have to live in Europe, where Madigans cannot see and envy them.

With the mien of one who has come at last into her own, Split accepted his invitation to carry her up to town, and, with a facetious twinkle in his eyes that added to his likeness to a stately Santa Claus (though his was not a reputation for benevolence), he lifted her and set her down under the silky fur rugs.

Split nestled back in perfect content: at last she was fitly placed.

"Hitch on behind, Jack," she cried patronizingly, and the bonanza king's sleigh went up the hill with its queer freight: queer, for this was that one of them whose strength was subtlety, whose forte was guile, whose left hand knew

not the charitable acts of his right—and neither did the right, for that matter.

Thoroughly sophisticated are Comstock children as to the character of the masters of their masters, and Split Madigan knew how foreign to this man's nature a lovable action was. All the more, then, she valued the distinction which chance—fate—had made hers. And all the more did a something fierce and lawless and proud in herself leap to recognize the tyrant in him. Kings should be above law, as princesses were, was Split's creed; else why be kings and princesses?

"An' where would ye be a-goin' to, down this part o' the world so late?" she heard the unctuous voice above her inquire.

Split was silent. That the daughter of a bonanza king should have fancied for a moment that Indian Jim could be her father!

"An' who 's the gyurl with ye—the witch ye call Jack?"

" 'T is n't a girl." That virility which Split's wild nature respected and admired forbade her denying the boy his sex. "It 's a boy —Jack—Jack Cody."

King Sammy laughed. His was rich, strong laughter, and men who heard it on C Street (they had reached the main thoroughfare now,

so fleet were these kingly horses of Split's father) knew it—and knew, too, what poor, mean thoughts lay behind it.

"An' this Cody," he said, turning his handsome head to look down at the boy on his sled behind. "Cody—Cody, now," he continued, with royalty's marvelous memory, "your father killed in the Ophir—eh? Time of the fire on the 1800—yes—yes! An' I was goin' to give him a point that very day. Well—well!"

"Ye did!" The boy looked up resentful, and met those smiling, crafty eyes.

"No! An' he sold short? Too bad! Too bad! I thought sure that stock was goin' down. My, the bad man that told me it was! I hope he did n't lose?" he chuckled.

"All we had," said the boy.

"Tut—tut—tut! What a pity! Have n't I always said it 's wicked to deal in stocks!" The king shook his sorrowful old head, then turned to the princess beside him. "An' it 's out for a ride ye 'd be, sweetheartin' on the sly, eh?"

"He 's not! I was not!" Split's cheeks grew hotter. He was her father, this splendid, handsome king, yet never had she felt for poor Francis Madigan what she felt now for the man beside her.

"What, then?"

"I was going down for—for a reason," she stammered.

"To be sure! To be sure!" chuckled his old Majesty. "An' ye 've told your father an' mother ye were goin', no doubt."

"No, I—did n't. I—could n't."

"Coorse not; coorse not, but ye—"

"Let me out!" cried Split.

The sneer in his voice had set her aflame. She rose in the sleigh, cast off the furs, and, stamping like a fury, tried to seize the reins.

"Ho! Ho!" The old monarch's bowed broad shoulders shook with laughter as he caught her trembling hands and held them. "What a little spitfire! A divvle of a temper ye 've got, my dear. Cody, now, does he like gyurls with such a temper?"

"Will you let me out?" Her voice was hoarse with anger.

"Can't ye wait till we get t' a crossin', ye little termagant?"

"No—no!" She tore her hands from him, and, with a quick, lithe leap from the low sleigh, landed, a bit dazed, in the snow banked high on the side of the street.

Uncle Sammy stared after her a moment. Then he remembered the boy behind.

"Hi—there!" he cried, looking over his shoulder as he reached for his whip. "Git!"

But Cody had the street-boy's quickness. All he had to do was to let go the end of rope he held, and the leg-breaker slipped smoothly back, while the king's runnered chariot shot ahead, drawn by the flying horses on whose backs the whip had descended.

"Ugh!" shivered Split, as she made her way out of the drift. "It 's cold, Jack. Let 's run."

Together they hauled the leg-breaker up the hill, parting at the snow-caked, wandering flights of steps, which seemed weary and worn with their endless task of climbing the mountain to Madigan's door.

Irene mounted them quickly. She was cold, and it had grown very dark and late; so late that the lamp shone out from the dining-room, warning her that it must be dangerously near to dinner-time. She had reached the last flight when Sissy came flying out along the porch to meet her.

"Split—ssh!" she cautioned, with a friendliness that surprised Split, who remembered how well she had washed that round, innocent face in the snow only a few hours ago—the face of Sissy, the unforgiving. "Dinner 's ready," she went on, "but father is n't down yet. Go round the back way, and you can get in without his knowing how late you are."

Split did not budge. The sight of Sissy had made her a Madigan again, prepared for any emergency the appearance of her arch-enemy might portend. "What are you up to?" she demanded suspiciously.

"Oh!" Sissy turned haughtily on her heel. "If you want to go in and catch it—go."

But Split did not want to catch it. Her day's experience had made her content to bear the eccentricities of her humble foster-father, but she was by no means anxious to be the instrument that should provoke a characteristic expression of them.

She slipped around the back way, passing through Wong's big kitchen, the heat and odors of which were grateful messages of cheer to her chilled little body. She flew up-stairs and tore off her wet clothing, and was out in the hall, buttoning hastily as she walked, when the door-bell rang.

In some previous existence Split Madigan must have been a most intelligent horse in some metropolitan fire department. It was her instinct still to run at the sound of the bell; every other Madigan, therefore, delighted in preventing that impulse's gratification. But this time Bessie came hurriedly to meet her and even speed her on her errand.

"'Oh, you need n't glare at me!' exclaimed Bep"

"Quick—it 's your father, Split!" she cried.

Split looked at her. She trusted Bep no more than she did Sissy, whose lieutenant the blonde twin was.

"Oh, you need n't glare at me!" exclaimed Bep, her guilty conscience sensitive to accusation by implication. "Fom told me all you told her about him. She was 'fraid you were coming after her for letting you fall off the see-saw, and she told me the whole thing. She said you expected him to-night—don't you?"

"How—do you know it 's—my father that 's at the door?" demanded Split, all the warier of the enemy because of her acquaintance with her secret.

"Why!" Bep opened clear, china-blue eyes, as shallow and baffling as bits of porcelain. "Has n't he been here once for you already, while you were out?"

Split turned and ran down the hall. In the minute this took she had lived through a long, heart-breaking, childish regret—regret for the familiar, apprehension of the unknown. It was so warm and snug in this Madigan house; she seemed so to belong there. Why must that unknown parent come to claim her just now, when her spirit was still sorely vexed with the fail-

ings of the various fathers she had borne with in one short afternoon!

She got to the top of the staircase that led down to the front door, when she saw that some one had preceded her. It was Madigan, who was on his way down to dinner; poor old Madigan, with his slippered, slow, but positive tread, his straight, assertive back expressing indignation, as it always did when his door-bell was rung. Oh, that familiar old back! Something swelled in Split's throat and held her choking, as she grasped the banister and gazed yearningly down upon him. For a moment she had the idea of flying down past him to save him from what was coming. But it was too late; already he had his hand on the door-knob. Did he know who it was for whom he was opening his door? Split gasped. Did he anticipate what was coming? Some one ought to tell him —to break it to him—to—

But evidently Split herself could not have done this, for in almost the identical moment that Madigan resentfully threw open the door, a stream of water was dashed into his astonished face.

From her point of vantage on the stairway Split saw a paralyzed Sissy, the empty pitcher in her guilty hand, the grin of satisfaction

frozen on her panic-stricken round face; while, before she fled, her eyes shot one quick, hunted glance over Madigan's dripping head to the joyous enemy above.

And Split was joyous. Her explosive laugh pealed out in the second before fear of her father stifled it. So this was how Sissy had planned to get even; so this was the plot behind Bep's baffling blue eyes! And only the accident of Madigan's going to the door had saved Split—and confounded her enemy.

Oh, it was good to be a Madigan! Standing there dry and triumphant, Split hugged herself—her very own self—her individuality, which at this minute she would not have changed for anything the world had to offer. To be a Madigan, one's birthright to laugh and do battle with one's peers; and to win, sometimes through strength, sometimes through guile, sometimes through sheer luck—but to win!

THE LAST STRAW

THE LAST STRAW

YOUNG as she was, Frances Madigan had known a great sorrow. She remembered (or fancied she did, having heard the circumstance so often related) how Francis Madigan had seized and confiscated her cradle as soon as her sex had been avowed.

"It 's too bad, Madigan!" was the form in which Dr. Murchison had made the announcement of her birth.

"It 's the last straw—that 's what it is," Madigan answered grimly, bearing the cradle out to the woodshed. There he chopped it to pieces, as though defying a perverse destiny to send him another daughter.

With tears running down her cheeks, Frances had witnessed the pathetic sight—or, if she had not, she believed she had; which was quite as effective in her narrative of the occurrence.

"And he took my cwadle," Frank was ac-

customed to relate, with an abused sniff to punctuate each phrase, "and he chopped it wif the hatchet all in little bits o' pieces."

"How big, Frank?" Sissy liked to ask.

"Teeny-weeny bits—little as that," Frank whined, still in character, and showing a small finger-nail. "And—"

"And then what did you do?" prompted Sissy.

Frank stamped her foot. The cynical tone of the question grated upon an artistic temperament at the crucial moment when it was composing and acting at the same time. "Don't you say it, Sissy Madigan!" she cried petulantly. "I can say it myself. And then" —turning to Maude Bryne-Stivers, to whom she was telling the touching incident, with a resumption of her first manner, and her most heartrending tone—"and then I looked first at my cwadle and then at my father, and I cwied —and cwied—and cwied—and—"

One is limited at four and is apt to strive for emphasis by the simple method of repetition. Frank always "cwied and cwied" till some interruption came to the rescue and furnished a climax.

"You dear little lump of sugar!" cried Miss Bryne-Stivers at the proper moment, lifting

the chubby mourner off her feet and out of her pose at the same time.

And Frank, seated on the lady's lap, was content with her effect.

It was a small matter, anyway, with Frank Madigan—the loss of a pose or two; she had so many. A parody of parodies was the smallest Madigan, and her jokes were the shadows of shades of jokes handed down ready-made to her. Yet she was convinced that they were good; otherwise the Madigans would not have laughed at them long before she adopted them.

She herself was a victim—as was the gentleman after whom she was named—of a surplusage of femininity about the house. All female children are mothers before they are girls, the earliest sex-tendency having a scientific precedence over others; and the Madigans "played with" their smallest sister bodily, as with a doll whose mechanism presented more possibilities than that of any mechanical toy they had seen—in some other child's possession. Later they were charmed—if but for a while—by the field her mentality provided for experimental work. There were times when Frances Madigan had a mother for every day in the week; there were days when she had no mother at all; and there

were occasions when she was adopted as a whole, and for a stated time, by some Madigan with a theory, which was tried upon her with all the remorselessness of a faddist before she was given over as completely to its successor.

Thus Sissy had taken possession of her and made of her, in the short time her enthusiasm lasted, a visible replica of that which Sissy tried to delude herself into thinking was her own character. In those days she cut poor Frank's curls off and plastered the child's hair down in a strong-minded fashion. She insisted upon her disciple's pronouncing clearly and distinctly. She inaugurated a régime of practical common sense, small rewards and severe punishments, and taught Frank how to count. But not to spell; for Sissy had introduced the fashion among Madigans of spelling out the word which was the key-note of a sentence—a proceeding that exasperated Frank. "Don't you let her have any c-a-n-d-y; Aunt Anne says 't ain't good for her," was a sample of the abuses that drove Frank nearly mad with curiosity and indignation.

But finally Sissy joined the Salvation Army with her protégée (religion had all the attraction of the impliedly forbidden to the Madigans), and was discovered by Francis

Madigan one evening on C Street, putting up a fluent prayer in a nasal tremolo—an excellent imitation of the semi-hysterical falsetto of the bonneted enthusiast who had preceded her.

Madigan looked from Sissy—her hypocritical eyes upcast, while her soul was ravished by the whispered comment upon her precocity, to which she lent an encouraging ear—to Frank, kneeling angelically beside her. Something in himself, his enthusiastic, emotional, long-forgotten, youthful self, felt the tug of sympathy at the sight, and, after his first irritated start, he stood there behind the watching crowd with no thought of interference.

"You can thank your stars, you unco guid lassie," he said within himself, his sarcastic eyes on Sissy's holy face, "that you 've not a more religious and more conventional man for a father. 'T is one like that would yank you out of your play-acting preaching, or my name 's not Madigan—ahem!"

He did not know that the exclamation had been uttered aloud. Their father was unaware of the habit; but his daughters knew well that stentorian clearing of the throat which served for a warning that he was about to speak, and also a notification that he had spoken and would permit no difference of opinion. In the

midst of her religio-dramatic ecstasy, Sissy heard that sound behind her, and jumped to her feet as though brought painfully back to a sorrowing, sinful world.

"And he tooked her," said Frances later, in relating the affair to an eager audience of Madigans, "and he whipped her awful!"

"With his whole hand?" asked Bep, feeling it to be the partizan's duty to doubt.

"Uh-huh!" The small fabricator nodded her head in slow and awful confirmation.

"That shows, Frank Madigan!" said Bep, scornfully turning her back. "He never whips with more than two fingers."

And yet it was the confident belief of the Madigans that if it had been anybody but Sissy, that somebody would have been eaten alive!

It was Split who next adopted the Last Straw. Under her tutelage Frank learned to climb her sister's body and stand upright and fearless on her shoulders. She was also initiated into the great game of " fats," which the Madigans played winter evenings on the crumb-cloth in the dining-room; said crumb-cloth being printed in large squares of red and white, one of which was chalked off for the ring.

Frank's induction into the game led to a grand battle between Split and Sissy, the latter contending that the baby's fingers could not properly handle and shoot the marbles. But Sissy ought to have known better than to make such a point, as the Madigans had a peculiar way of playing fats, for which Frank—being a Madigan—was as fitted by nature as any of her seniors.

It consisted, first, in hauling out the big box of marbles, in which the booty won by the whole family was kept—the Madigans were gamblers, of course, as was everything born on the Comstock. Second, in a desperate controversy as to how the marbles were to be divided. Third, in a compromise, which necessitated that a complete count be made of every marble in the box—and the Madigans' unfeminine skill made this a question of handling hundreds of them, of suspiciously watching one another, of losing and of finding; and it all took time. Fourth, a decision as to handicaps. Fifth, a heated discussion of the relative values of puries, pottries, agates, crystals, and 'dobies. Sixth, a fiery attack from Sissy on Split's lucky taw. Seventh, the falling asleep of Frank squarely over the ring. And eighth, the sending of the whole tribe to bed by Aunt Anne—

the entire evening having been taken up with arranging an order of business, and not a stroke of business accomplished.

But the Split sphere of influence over the disputed territory of Frances was considerably circumscribed by the affair of the stage-coach. It stood—a dusty, lumbering vehicle that made daily trips down from the mountain to the small towns in the cañon—upon a raised platform in front of Baldy Bob's. Baldy Bob, who departed with it the first thing in the morning and returned late in the afternoon, hauled it each day up on to the platform, intending to get out the hose and wash it off—after dinner when he came back from down-town. But he never came back till time to hitch up and start down the cañon again. So the old coach was left high and dry, while the sun went down behind Mount Davidson and the brightest stars in all the world shone out from a black-blue firmament unmarred by the smallest haze.

Till Split discovered it.

To Split, who had never traveled by any means other than her own lithe limbs and Jack Cody's sled, the coach's big, low, dusty body, its heavy high wheels, its dusky interior smelling of heated leather and twig-scented, sum-

mer-sunned country dust, were romance incarnate. It meant voyaging to her, this coach: strange sights, queer peoples, the sea that she had never seen, the rippling of rivers she had never heard, the smell of pasture-land, of pine forests, of lake-dipped willows, of flowers—valleys full of flowers, like those that bloomed in Mrs. Pemberton's garden, but unlike those enchanted blossoms in not being irrevocably attached to the bush on which they grew, and unguarded by any Mrs. Ramrod, whose most gracious act was to hold up a rose on its stalk between forefinger and thumb and permit a flower-hungry girl to bend down and sniff it. On the same principle, Mrs. Ramrod *showed* her preserves, but she never bestowed a rose "for keeps," nor did it ever seem to occur to her that one might want a taste of that which made her glass jars so temptingly beautiful.

Split "took a dare" the first time she mounted Baldy Bob's coach. She climbed up to the driver's high seat in front with as much hidden trepidation but as unhesitatingly as she would have plunged down a shaft, to show Sissy, who was a coward, how brave her sister was.

But after she got up there, Sissy faded out of the world. In Baldy Bob's coach Split was

seized with *Wanderlust.* She sat erect and still up there in front, her hands clasped in her lap, her shining eyes averted from the motionless tongue below and fixed on the unrolling landscapes of the world; on plains and valleys, on villages nestling in trees and flying past, on great rolling fields of grain—perhaps a smooth, light, continuous sort of sage-brush, wrinkling in the wind as the sunflowers seem to when one looks up at the mountain from the sluice-box.

Yet with the advent of Frances into this strange game of rapt silences there came a change. Frank's imagination did not tempt her abroad strange countries for to see; she merely wanted to ride down and off the platform.

"Make it go, Split," she begged, with a trust in her big sister's capacity that Split would have perished rather than admit to be unfounded.

"Will you hold on tight?" she asked Frances.

The child nodded, grasping the dashboard firmly. With the ease of long practice, Split got to the big wheel and leaped to the ground. She had noticed the big stone which Baldy Bob had slipped in front of the hind wheel,

and she fancied it was part of the reason why the stage-coach could not be moved.

She was mistaken: it was the whole reason. And when Split had pushed and tugged and kicked with all her strength, laying herself flat at last and bracing her toes against the other wheel to get a leverage, her first feeling when she saw the coach move above her head was of delight at the unexpected. Her second was of unmixed terror; for, gaining an impetus from its descent on the inclined plane that led from the platform, the coach rattled briskly down Sutton Avenue, headed for the cañon, with Frank clutching the dashboard and laughing aloud in glee.

Split Madigan had always fancied she could run. She never knew how impotent human fleetness is till she saw that lumbering coach go plunging swiftly and more swiftly away from her, across B Street, and tearing down the next hill with a speed that made her puny efforts laughable.

Baldy Bob, emerging from the saloon on the corner with that feverishly distorted view of the world due to never going back home after dinner down-town, saw his coach come down upon him as if to demand the washing so long promised. If it had been morning, he would

have been properly afraid of getting in the way of the monster let loose. But in the evening Bob was accustomed to the occurrence of peculiar things. So he ran—at that time of day he could run better than walk—out to the middle of the street, threw up his arms, and called hoarsely upon the mad thing to stop.

It did—for a moment, when it came in contact with his body; but it was long enough for its course to be deflected from the steep hill below and turned northward down the comparatively level cross street.

When Bob picked himself up and followed, he found a thin, white-faced, red-haired girl running swiftly beside him. Later he accompanied her and the plucky little Frank (still smiling and chuckling over her fine ride) up the hill to the home of Mr. Francis Madigan, where he demanded damages—both personal and mechanical.

"And fa-ther tooked her in his own room," Frank said with shuddering unction, as she told the tale, "and she 's in there yet!"

It was Fom who awakened a sense of the beautiful in Frank. She and Bep were continually playing London Bridge, in the course of which it became necessary to demand:

"Which would you rather have (that means,

like best): a diamond horse covered with stars, or a golden cradle with red silk pillows?"

Sentiment and the sad experience of her babyhood always prompted Frank to choose the cradle, of course. After which, her preference promptly became of no importance whatever; the whole beautiful business was put aside, and she was bidden to get behind Fom. She discovered later that whether she preferred diamonds and stars to gold and red silk, it was all the same: she invariably had to get behind one twin or the other, clasp her tightly about the waist, and pull—and pull—till the whole universe gave way and she plumped down on the ground with a big twin falling on top of her.

But there was another phase of the beautiful which was far more satisfactory to Frank, while it lasted. Fom discovered it one day when Split took Dora away from her, just because the brunette twin preferred her lunch to the burned potatoes Split had baked in the back yard when they were playing emigrants. It was then, in the depths of her grief, that the inspiration came to her.

"Shall Fom make you look awful pretty, Frank?" she asked, in the form which children suppose wheedles babies most successfully.

Frank did n't know; she was suspicious of

the hollowness of the beautiful and the inutility of choosing. Besides, she was making dolls' biscuit just then from a piece of dough Wong had given her, cutting out each individual bun with Aunt Anne's thimble.

But Florence coaxed and threatened and bribed, and when Francis Madigan got home that night to dinner, he found his big porch covered with children gathered from blocks around. Each held in his or her hand one pin or more—the price of admission to the show. (Fom was a most thrifty and businesslike Madigan.) And the show, which he as well as they saw in the interval between the opening of his front door and its swift closing, was Frances's plump, naked body draped in a sheet, posing, with uplifted arms and an uncertain, apprehensive smile, on a tottering draped pedestal, which fell with a crash when Fom, who was crouched behind steadying it, beheld her father's face.

"And he tooked her," with bated breath Frank repeated the monotonous refrain of her saga, "and he made her thwow evewy—pin—she 'd made—out the fwont window!"

As a Madigan, Frances should have been above fear. She was—except of the tank in

the back room up-stairs. Its gurglings and chucklings were more than mortal four-years-old could bear at night in the dark, particularly after Bep had taught her to be superstitious.

Bep's nature was spongy with a capacity for saturation. She took in every new child fad and folly. She believed in a multiplicity of remedies, and was ready to try a new one—on somebody else—whenever the occasion offered. When Frank got the whooping-cough, and used to march around the dining-room table, stamping in her paroxysms of coughing and of speechless anger at the Madigans who followed mimicking her, Bep decided that she would try the latest cure she had heard of. So she wandered down to the gas-works one day, Frank's hand in hers, to give her patient the benefit of breathing the heavily charged atmosphere down there.

"How-do, Mrs. Grayson?" she greeted the gas-man's wife amiably, as she opened the kitchen door.

Mrs. Grayson, her babies leaving her side to cluster interestedly around Frank, replied that she and the children were well; that the epidemic of whooping-cough had not reached them because they lived so far out of town.

"Yes," assented Bep, politely; "and then, the smell of gas is so good for whooping-cough. That keeps 'em well. And that 's why I brought Frank down here."

Mrs. Grayson's excitable motherhood took alarm. "I never heard," she said quickly, "that breathing in coal-tar smells kept off whooping-cough."

"No, neither did I, though p'r'aps it does. But it cures—I know that."

"You don't mean to say—" Mrs. Grayson flew like a terrified hen for her chicks, lifting two by an arm each clear from the ground and hustling the third into the kitchen before her.

"Yep, she 's got it," said Bep, proudly. And Frank, feeling called upon to be interesting, burst into a convulsive corroboration of the glad tidings.

"You nasty little minx!" exclaimed Mrs. Grayson, as she shut the door in Bep's face.

"What 's 'minx'?" Frank asked her sister, as they toiled up toward town again.

"Oh, it 's a wild animal," answered Bep, readily; "but she don't know how to say it. She 's going to have bad luck, though; anybody can tell that by the way she walked under that ladder. I should n't be a bit surprised if every last one of her children gets the whooping-cough!"

And Frank felt sorry for the Graysons. For she was sure that Bep knew whereof she spoke. She knew the laws of the superstitious country in which she dwelt, did Bep: a country where if you sing before you eat, you 're bound to cry before you sleep; where, if you put your corset-waist on wrong side out, and are hardy enough to change it, you deserve what you 're likely to get; where no sane girl will tempt Providence by walking on a crack; where, if you lose something, you have only to spit in the palm of your hand,—if you 're dowered in the matter of saliva,—strike the tiny pool sharply, and say:

> " Spit, spit, spider!
> If you show me where my pencil is
> I 'll give you a keg of cider!"

Then note the direction which the escaping particles of saliva take, and there you are! or, rather, there it is—the lost article.

Or there it ought to be, unless you have been guilty of some inexcusable act, such as omitting to wish at the very instant a star is falling, or the first time you taste each new fruit in season, or if you have forgotten to say:

"Star light, star bright,
First star I 've seen to-night,
I wish I may, I wish I might
Have the wish I wish to-night!"

It was Bep who taught Frank to count white horses; to pick up a pin when its head was turned toward her, to let it lie when it pointed the other way; to bite the tea-grounds left in a cup, and declare gravely, if soft, that a female visitor might be expected, and, if hard, a male; never to cut friendship by giving or accepting a knife, a pin—indeed, anything sharp; and never, by any chance, to tempt the devil of bad luck by going out of a house by a different door than that by which she had entered.

The versatile Frank was most teachable. When Bep was "collecting bows," Frances would obligingly bow and bob for her minutes at a time, like a Chinese mandarin, or like some small priestess observing a solemn rite. What the Bad Luck was, the terrible alternative of all these precautions, poor Frank could form no idea. But she had come to associate it with the babbling tank, which seemed at night, when all was still, to be gurgling, "Bad Luck—Bad Luck!" threateningly at her.

Then she would go over her conduct during the day, carefully scrutinizing her every action that might have given this chuckling Bad Luck a hold over her.

Not a crack had been stepped on that she could remember; not a pin picked up that should have been let lie; not—

The scream that burst from Frances one Sunday night during this self-catechism brought Madigan and all the family to her bedside.

"What is it—what is it, child?" demanded her father.

And Frank repeated like a Maeterlinck or a bobolink, holding up a shaking small hand whose nails Aunt Anne had trimmed that very morning:

"Monday for health,
Tuesday for wealth,
Wednesday the best day of all.
Thursday for cwosses,
Fwiday for losses—
Saturday no day at all.
And better the child had never been bawn
That pared its nails on a Sunday mawn!"

"And fa-ther tooked Bep," remarked Frank the next day, the light of desire fulfilled in her

eye, "and he said 'You ox!' and smacked her wif two fingers!"

Miss Madigan, who was a congenital sentimentalist, her tendency confirmed by a long course of novel-reading, would have loved a female Fauntleroy, and hoped to find it in each of her brother's children in turn—only to be bitterly disappointed when they came to an expressing age.

It occurred to her once to satisfy her maternal cravings—so perversely left ungratified amid much material that lacked mothering—with an imported angel-child. She chose Bombey Forrest's three-year-old brother for the purpose; a small manikin manufactured according to recipe by his mother, whom he had been taught to call "Dear-rust" in imitation of his pernicious progenitor; whose curls were as long, whose trousers were as short, whose collars were as big, whose sashes were as flaunting as feminine folly could make them.

The Madigans hailed his advent with delight the night he was loaned to their aunt, in their mistaken glee fancying his visit was to themselves. Miss Madigan soon undeceived them. At table he sat next to that devoted lady, who

heaped the choicest bits upon his plate of a menu which had been ordered solely with regard to infantile tastes. Afterward this maiden lady (whose genius for mothering cruel fate had condemned to waste its sweetness upon half a dozen mere Madigans) built card houses for her borrowed baby, read him the nursery rhymes that Sissy used to tell to Frances, confiscated Fom's Dora for his pleasure, and Split's book of interiors made of illustrated advertisements of furniture, which she had cut out and arranged tastefully upon a tissue-paper background. She dangled her old-fashioned enameled watch before his jaded eyes, and even permitted him to hold Dusie, the canary, who pecked furiously at the presuming hand that detained her.

At this the borrowed baby set up a howl of alarm, whereupon he was given Sissy's jackstones—not altogether to that young lady's sorrow, for at that moment Split was collecting a cruel pinch or bestowing a stinging slap for every point in the game she had just won.

To the bathing of the child Miss Madigan gave her personal attention, while Kate waited for the tub, into which it was her nightly task to coax Frances. Then, when her charge was ready for bed, the devoted aunt of other chil-

dren sat rocking the borrowed baby softly till he fell asleep. The whole household hushed that night when Baby Fauntleroy Forrest's eyelids fell. An indignant lot of young Madigans were hustled off to bed that his slumbers might not be disturbed; and yet the moment Miss Madigan laid him, with infinite care and a sentimental smile, in her own bed, his eyes flew open, like the disordered orbs of a wax doll that has forgotten it was made to open its eyes when in a vertical position and keep them shut when placed horizontally. He saw a strange face bending over him, and he howled with terror.

Miss Madigan tried to comfort him, babbling fondest baby-talk in vain.

"I yant to go home!" wailed Aunt Anne's Fauntleroy.

Why, no; he did n't want to go home, the lady to whom he had been loaned assured him. Mama was asleep and daddy was asleep and Bombey was asleep and the pussy was—

"I yant to go home!" bellowed the borrowed baby.

But how could he go home? the lady, a bit impatiently, demanded. Was n't he all undressed? Did he want to go through the streets all undressed—fie, fie, for shame!

"I yant to go home!" screamed Fauntleroy Forrest.

"Sissy—Irene—some one come here and amuse this child!" called Aunt Anne, at her wits' end. Fauntleroy was black in the face from holding his breath, and his borrower was nervously exhausted by the tension of a day spent in attendance upon the lovely child.

A troop of nightgowned Madigans came joyously in. For the edification of Fauntleroy, sitting up wide-eyed now in Aunt Anne's big bed, the tears still on his cheeks, the Madigans made monkeys of themselves till he dropped off asleep at last, when they were dismissed by a frazzled maiden lady, who was left looking at the small thing lying in her bed as at some strange animal whose waking she dreaded.

In the middle of the night and again toward morning the Madigans heard Fauntleroy's frightened scream, and chuckled like the depraved young things they were. But when Francis Madigan got up and, candle in hand, his queer nightcap tumbling over his left eye, and his gaunt shadow covering the wall and wavering over the ceiling, came to demand of Miss Madigan what in thousand devils was the matter, the borrowed baby was thrown into convulsions; while Don, the big Newfound-

land, awakened by the din, burst into hoarse barks that the mountains echoed and reëchoed. After this it seemed best to Aunt Anne to sit up in bed for the rest of the night, making shadow-pictures on the wall for Fauntleroy.

Miss Madigan's high color had faded the next morning. Accustomed to unbroken sleep, she had not rested half an hour the whole night. It seemed that Fauntleroy Forrest was in the habit of lying across his bed instead of along it, and he had so terrorized the poor lady that she had not dared to move him, when he did fall asleep toward morning and she felt his toes digging into her ribs, lest he wake.

"Hurry with your breakfast, Sissy," she said faintly, sipping her tea, "so that you can take him home before school."

"Don't yant to go home!" whimpered the baby, whom the morning light and the presence of many small Madigans had reassured.

"He could stay and play with Frank, couldn't he, Aunt Anne?" suggested Sissy, sweetly.

Miss Madigan's look spoke volumes.

"Yes, yes," cried Fauntleroy. "Don't yant to go home!"

His papa would be lonesome, Miss Madigan told him, archly; and his mama would be lonesome, and Bombey—

"Don't yant to go home!" wept the baby.

"There! There! . . . Take him, Frank, into my room and amuse him—anything, only don't let him cry!" exclaimed Miss Madigan. "I 'm going into Kate's room to lie down. I 'm exhausted and—"

"Did Fauntleroy disturb you, Aunt Anne?" asked Kate, sympathetically.

But Miss Madigan hurried away. She was so unnerved she feared that she might weep. But, after nearly half an hour's trying, she found she was too tired to sleep, after all, and rising wearily, she went back to her room for the book she had been reading.

The sight that met her eyes, as she opened the door, completed her undoing. There was Fauntleroy, with an uncomprehending grin on his cherubic face, pinching each separate leaf of her cherished sensitive-plant. Evidently the borrowed baby did not exactly understand the desperately funny quality of the act, but he knew it must be the funniest thing in the world, for the Madigans were writhing grotesquely in the unbounded merriment it caused.

With a cry, Miss Madigan flew forward and sharply slapped the destructive baby hands.

"I yant to go home!" screamed Fauntleroy.

"Yes; and I want you to go, too" Miss Madigan declared, incensed. "Get his things, Sissy, this minute."

"But I want him to play wif," whimpered Frank. She was not so slow but that she could learn the lesson Fauntleroy's success taught.

Miss Madigan looked at her a moment. "Oh, you do!" she ejaculated sarcastically. "You have n't sisters enough—you want more noise and confusion in this house!"

The wise Madigans looked from her to one another and merely thought things. There was sadly little of the "angel child" about them. Their intuition was keen enough to penetrate their aunt's secret wishes and tastes, and they were occasionally tempted, for the spoils to be gotten out of it, to play up to that lady's ideals. But Aunt Anne was considered almost too easy by the Madigans, whom honor restricted to those foemen worthy of their steel. Frances was the only one who could, without losing caste, cater to her aunt's well-known and deeply detested sentimentality.

She did for a time, and it was from Miss Madigan that she learned her famous accomplishment. It was sung, or rather droned, and it went like this:

"B—A—Ba,
B—E—Be,
B—I—Bi—
Ba—Be—Bi;
B—O—Bo,
Ba—Be—Bi—Bo,
B—U—Bu,
Ba—Be—Bi—Bo—Bu!"

Intoxicated by success, Frank sang this subtle ditty one day for Francis Madigan. He listened to it with that puzzled expression which his children's vagaries brought to his lined, stern face.

"Who taught you that nonsense, Frances?" he demanded sternly when she had finished.

Frank began to whimper. This was not the effect she had intended to produce.

"Who told you to say that gibberish?" her father repeated angrily.

Frank stammered the answer.

"And he tooked her—" she began her account of the incident afterward.

"Oh, you awful little liar!" interrupted a chorus of Madigans.

And Frank laughed with them. How she would have completed the sentence, if she had been permitted, she herself did not know.

A READY LETTER-WRITER

A READY LETTER-WRITER

SPLIT threw herself with a bump against Miss Madigan's door. It remained unanswering closed.

"Where 's Aunt Anne?" she asked Sissy, whom she had nearly walked over as she sat playing jackstones in the hall.

Sissy looked up. Assuming a rigidly erect position and scholastically correct finger-movement, she mimicked her aunt at her desk so faithfully that Split could almost see the close-lined pages of Miss Madigan's ornate handwriting on the carpet where her disrespectful niece pretended to trace it.

"Scribbling, huh?" Split asked.

Sissy nodded.

Split shrugged her shoulders impatiently. She had intended to ask a favor of Aunt Anne, but she knew how useless it would be now. So she pushed past Sissy, entered the room softly, and returned with a long-trained grenadine skirt.

Sissy's round eyes opened enviously. "Did she say you could have it?" she asked.

A muffled sound which could be variously interpreted came from Split, who was throwing the skirt over her head.

"Did she?" persisted Sissy, putting her jackstones in her pocket and rising emulatively.

But Irene was doubling fold after fold of the skirt in front to shorten it; behind her the train billowed with an elegance that sent ecstatic thrills through her and a passion of envy through her sister.

"Is she writing yet?" Sissy asked at length.

Irene nodded. She was cinching her sash tight about the waist, so that her trained skirt might not come off in the ardor of "playing lady." When Sissy disappeared, and reappeared with her aunt's claret-colored poplin, Split was catching up her train with a grace that was simply ravishing as she rustled away.

"What 'll you say to her—afterward?" called Sissy after her, prudently facing the future, even in the height of delight induced by feeling ruffles about her feet.

"Pouf!" A train meant domesticity and dignity to Sissy. In Split it bred and fostered a spirit of coquetry; she believed herself

"A train meant domesticity and dignity to Sissy. In Split it bred and fostered a spirit of coquetry"

to be very French in long skirts. "I 'll just say she said 'Yes' when I asked her. She never knows what she says when she 's writing."

Sissy nodded understandingly, and rustled in a most ladylike manner after her senior. The twins saw the two beautiful creatures swishing down the front steps, bound for the street to show their glory and feel the peacock's delight in dragging his tail in the dust.

"Did she say you could have 'em?" they shrieked.

And Sissy responded with that quick imitative gesture that signified scribbling.

With a light on their faces such as the Goths might have worn when pillaging Rome, the twins made for the treasure-house. A few moments later they rustled gorgeously down the steps, followed by Frances, wearing her aunt's embroidered red flannel petticoat. Unfortunately, Frank's heels caught in this, as she too strutted worldward, and down she fell, bumping from step to step, gaining momentum as she bumped, and threatening to roll clear down to Taylor Street, and so on down, down into the cañon, if she had not bumped safely at last into the twins. They, hearing her coming, had turned their backs and joined hands,

and catching hold of the shaky banister on each side, presented a natural bulwark beyond which Frances and her bumps and shrieks might not pass.

And through it all Miss Madigan wrote.

Miss Madigan was writing letters. Indeed, Miss Madigan was always writing letters. In any emergency she might be trusted to concoct a long and literary epistle, which she rephrased, edited, and copied till she felt all an author's satisfaction.

For the Madigans' Aunt Anne was afflicted with *cacoëthes scribendi,* and was never so happy as when there was a letter to be written —except when she was actually writing it. But the heartlessness of the merely literary was very far indeed from Miss Madigan's ideal. She had the happiness to believe that, besides being very beautiful, her letters were most useful—in fact, indispensable. When everything else failed she wrote a letter. When that failed she wrote another.

A Malthusian consequence of her epistolary fertility, it might be feared, would be the necessary exhaustion of correspondents. But Miss Madigan's was a soul above the inevitable, as well as a pen divorced from the prac-

tical. On those occasions when the future of her nieces pressed itself questioningly upon that lady's mind she met the threat by declaring firmly to herself that she would "do her duty to those motherless children." It happened that her duty was her pleasure. It was her dissipation to suffer—on paper. In letters she enjoyed being miserable. No relative, therefore, however distant, no acquaintance, however slight, was exempt from this epistolary plague. To take the darkest view, most genteelly expressed; to make the most forthright and pitiful appeal in a ladylike and polished phrase; to picture the inevitable and speedy alternative if her plea were disregarded; and then to sign herself, "With a thousand apologies, and the assurance that only the extreme need of some one's doing something for poor Francis's children would bring me to trouble you again,"—this was Miss Madigan's vice. And she was as intemperate in yielding to it as only the viciously good can be.

A rebuff, absolute silence, even the return of her letter unopened, produced in her not the slightest diminution of faith in the power of her pen. Invariably when she mailed a letter she was so struck by her own summing up

of the situation that she felt there could not be the smallest doubt of a favorable response. He who read it must be convinced. If he was not, why, there was but one thing to do—write to him again. If not to him, to another. And the Madigans were a prolific family, its members widely scattered and differentiated—an ideal clientele for a ready letter-writer.

So Miss Madigan wrote. Her wardrobe was pillaged, her privacy violated, yet she knew it not, or knew it only as one is aware of the buzzing of gnats when he rides his hobby through a cloud of them.

But there came an interruption which she was compelled to heed.

"Anne, I say!"

Miss Madigan's busy pen paused. It seemed to her that there was unusual irritation in her brother's irascible voice. Was it possible that he had knocked before, or was there—

The door opened in answer to her call, and Madigan stalked in. At sight of the open letter he held, Miss Madigan hastily covered the one she was writing.

"Perhaps," said her brother, suppressed rage vibrating in his voice, "it may be a change for you to *read* letters. Read that!" He

"Stamping . . . in a frenzy"

threw the page on the desk before her, banging his knuckles upon it in an excess of fury.

She took up the letter, a pretty rosy pink dyeing her cheeks (she was one of those old maids whose exquisitely delicate complexions retain a babylike freshness) as her eyes met the expression:

> Anne was always a sot where her pen was concerned. The habit's growing on her; she can evidently no more resist it than Miles could the bottle.

"It must be from Nora Madigan," she exclaimed, recognizing the touch.

"Yes, it is from Nora, and it incloses one of your own. There it is."

He threw down before the ready letter-writer a composition which had cost her much labor, the thought of many days, upon which she had based unnumbered hopes and built air-castles galore, none of which, to do the poor lady justice, was intended directly for her own habitation.

She took the letter and spread it out carefully before her; these epistolary children of hers were tenderly dear to Miss Madigan. Her eye caught a phrase here and there that appeared to be singularly felicitous. This one, for instance:

Poor Francis, of course, knows nothing about this letter. I am writing to you, my dear cousin, relying as much upon your discretion as upon your generosity.

Or this one:

And Cecilia—she is really talented, though a commonplace creature like myself can hardly give you an idea in just what direction.

Or this one:

As to Irene, apart from her voice, which is really exceptional, she is Francis over again—Francis as he was, a high-spirited, reckless, devil-may-care fellow, winning and tyrannical, as we all remember him in the old days when the world was young.

Or even this:

I am afraid Kate will have to teach school, young as she is. I can't tell you how I dread the long years of drudgery I see before this slender, spirited child —she is little more than that. Think, Miles, of these motherless children growing up in this wretched hole without the smallest advantage, and, if you can, help them; or get some one else to. Could n't you take Kate into your own family? I 'm sure she 'd marry

well, and Nora would n't be troubled with her long. She 's really very pretty. Or could n't you send me a little something to spend on clothes for her? Or could n't Nora be persuaded to send her—

"Well," thundered Madigan, standing over her, "it must be pretty familiar to you. Suppose you read what Nora says."

Miss Madigan put her own letter away with a sigh. It was really unaccountable that Miles could have resisted it.

" Miles passed away six weeks ago,"

she read aloud in an awed voice.

" He had been ailing all spring. This letter, which came a fortnight since, I opened, of course, and return it to you that you may be made aware (if you are not already) of the demands Anne makes upon comparative strangers.

" For myself, I regret very much that your affairs are in such a bad state. Anne says that there are six of your children, all girls; but that can't be true—she always loved to exaggerate miseries; it must be that her writing is so illegible that—"

Miss Madigan's voice rebelled. She could read aloud adverse opinions upon her com-

mon sense, her judgment, or her pride, but to impugn her penmanship was to commit the unforgivable.

"I think Nora is distinctly insulting," she declared.

"No!" Madigan laughed wrathfully. "Do you, now? Why, what has she said? Only that you 're a beggar, and I 'm a coward as well as a beggar, because I don't dare to beg in my own name."

"Does she say that?" exclaimed the literal Miss Madigan, shocked. "Where?" Her eyes sought the letter again.

"'Where'! Thousand devils—'where'!" Madigan tore it from her and threw it to the floor, stamping upon it in a frenzy.

Sighing, Miss Madigan leaned her head on her hand. It was hard enough to find one's most hopeful appeal wasted, without Francis's flying into such a rage.

A silence followed.

"Look here, Anne,"—Madigan's voice was manifestly struggling to be calm,—"you must quit this infernal letter-writing. How could you write to Miles Madigan for charity, knowing that he cheated me out of my share of the Tomboy? Half the mine was mine. You know that, and yet you hurt my—"

"I fail to see," responded Miss Madigan,

with dignity, "why I should not write to my own relatives; why I should not try, for my nieces' sake, to knit close again the raveled ties which your eccentricities have—"

"In order to get a box of old duds sent clear from Ireland!"

"Has Nora sent a box?" asked Miss Madigan, eager as a child. "You see, my letter did touch her, in spite of herself. And they won't be old duds. They 'll be handsome garments, Francis, just the thing for the girls' winter wardrobe. Now that Nora 's in mourning—"

With a crash that sent Miss Madigan's sensitive-plant rolling from its stand to the floor, Madigan banged the door behind him as he fled.

Miss Madigan flew to the rescue, and she had begun to scoop up the scattered earth when her eye lighted upon a line at the end of Nora's letter:

As you know, Miles had only a life-interest in the estate. At his death everything went to Miles Morgan. Perhaps Anne would do well to apply to him. The little matter of her never having seen him would not, of course, stand in her way.

"Of course not. Why should it?" Miss Madigan asked herself.

She knelt down upon the floor in the midst of the debris and took from her pocket the letter that Miles Madigan had never read. With the slightest change, the recopying of the first page or so, why could not—

Miss Madigan sat down at her desk. In a moment the steady, slow, studied pace of her pen was all that was heard in the disordered room, where the sensitive-plant lay half uprooted on the floor.

The Madigans were up and out. All A Street was alive with tales of them. In a cloud of dust due to their sweeping trains, they had swooped down like the gay Hieland folk they were, and captured the admiration and imitation of the slower, prosaic Lowlander.

They had not intended to go so far, accoutred as they were; but the attention they attracted first challenged, then seduced the vain things farther and farther, till they threw caution to the winds (and a boisterous Washoe zephyr was abroad) and sallied shamelessly forth. In their immediate train they carried Jack Cody, clothed and in his right sex, and Bombey Forrest, beating her drum. Crosby Pemberton slunk unrecognized in the rear.

In the van was Sissy victrix. She had cut

"Madigan banged the door behind him as he fled"

her adorer dead, dead, dead, and she now felt that resultant reckless uplift of spirits which is the feminine corollary to demonstration of power (preferably unjust and tyrannical) over the other sex.

"Let 's try to see the walking-match," she suggested to Split.

"How can we, with all that tagging after us?"

With a sweeping gesture to the rear, Split indicated the trained twins and Frances holding up her torn petticoat. Frank was bruised but beaming; in fact, she had never felt so much a Madigan, for she had never before been out on a raid.

"Let 'em tag," cried Sissy, gaily; her blood was up, and she knew no obstacles.

Down a clay-bank, into a vacant lot strewn with tin cans, slid the Madigans. Their trains hampered them, and, once started, only speed could save them. But they were not Comstockers and Madigans for nothing. Jack Cody, who had arrived first on the field, caught each whirling, dwarf-like figure as it came flying down, holding it a moment to steady it before he put it aside in order to receive the next female projectile.

Sissy was the last, and Cody, by way of

flourish to mark the conclusion of his labors, lifted Split's little sister, train and all, as he caught her, with a whoop of satisfaction.

His whoop was cut short abruptly, and he set her down, his ears tingling. For Sissy, outraged in her sense of dignity as well as in the offish prudery that characterized her, declined to accept patronage as anybody's little sister, and boxed his ears as well as she could in the short time given to her.

Cody looked at her. It was really the first time he had regarded her as an unrelated individual. "Ye know what a boy does when a girl strikes him," he threatened, a laughing glitter in his bold black eye that made Sissy's heart jump.

But she held herself very primly, and the masking puritan in her voice quelled him. "If he 's a coward—yes," she responded haughtily, hurrying on.

The boy looked after her as he joined Split. "She 's funny—your sister," he said lamely.

"Who—Sissy? Oh, she 's always cranky," said Irene, with Madigan candor when a relative was criticized.

They hurried on. The barn-like opera-house is built uphill, like all buildings on Virginia City's cross-streets, and it seems to burrow

into as well as climb the hill. In the rear, on the side where its boards were unpainted and unplaned, certain knots had been converted into knot-holes by the initiated.

Sissy was already on her knees, her eye glued to one of these apertures. All she could see was a short curve of empty seats, a man's shoulder and another's hat, a long space, and then the passing of a neat, long pair of women's gaiters unhidden by skirts, and soon after the nervous following of a smaller pair of women's ties.

"Why," she said, with a deep blush, fixing one eye upon the company, while the other blinked from the strain put upon it, "they 're women! It 's a women's walking-match."

"Sure," said Cody, without withdrawing his attention for a moment from the view inside. "The big, long feet belong to the one they call La Tourtillotte. She 's French. The German one 's Von Hagen."

"I think it 's a shame," gasped Sissy. "Let 's go home, Split."

Split, at her own particular knot-hole, affected not to hear. But Crosby Pemberton, perched in the elbow of some long scantlings bracing the building, took heart at Sissy's words.

"It is n't respectable, Sissy," he called to her. "No ladies go. Your aunt would n't like it."

This was fatal. At his voice Sissy hardened, and with a gulp of disgust she resolutely turned her attention to her knot-hole. In fact, as Crosby reiterated his advice, she felt called upon more spectacularly to ignore it, and seeing a more commanding and spacious knot-hole farther up, she mounted upon a big dry-goods box, and from there seated herself in a lone poplar, the apple of the proprietor's eye.

This was better, and in a sense it was also worse; for Sissy could plainly see La Tourtillotte, a gaunt, businesslike creature in short rainy-day skirt and sweater, her long, thin arms going like pump-handles, her dark, tense face set upon a goal which seemed ever to flee before her as her weary feet carried her slowly and still more slowly around the circular track.

Despite her shocked sense of propriety,—and the lawless young Madigans had very strict ideas as to the conventions for adults,—the ardor of the struggle, the uncertainty of the issue, seized upon Sissy. She heard a swift call from Irene, some distance below, and was vaguely aware that the company, skirted and otherwise, was beating a retreat. But the

smaller of the two contestants, on the other side of the knot-hole, had just come within the field of Sissy's rude lens. It was pitiable to see the haggard look on the German woman's plump face, the childish breakdown imminent behind the woman's staring eyes that met the bored glance of the male spectators doggedly, though her stout little body was still being carried resolutely, sluggishly, painfully along.

Sissy's hands flew to her breast. Something hurt her there, cried out to her, threatened her. She was furious with rage and choked with sympathetic sobs. She wanted to hurt somebody, and Jack Cody's insistent whistle, which kept sounding the retreat, so irritated and confused her that she fancied it was he that she would have liked to beat, as a representative of his cruel sex. But when she looked down, at last awake to the world on this side of the knot-hole, she saw Crosby Pemberton on the box at her feet, and knew who it was that she longed to punish for his own sins and every other man's.

"Quick—quick, Sissy! He 's coming!" he cried, tugging at her skirt.

"Who? Go 'way!" Sissy stamped viciously, as she stood clinging to a limb; yet in that very instant she had seen that all the Madi-

gans and their train had fled, save this poor servitor at her feet.

"Jan Lally—oh, hurry!"

Around the corner of the opera-house came a short-legged, bald little German, so stout and so loosely put together that, as he ran, his jelly-like flesh shook as though it was about to break the loose bag of skin that held it. It was Lally's opera-house, and Lally was come to catch trespassers in the act of seeing without paying.

Sissy's heart jumped to her throat. In the course of their maraudings, the Madigans were not unaccustomed to a stern-chase and a lively one, yet now it seemed to her that strategy was the watchword. Perched high up in the tree, hidden by its foliage, who would notice her—if only Crosby would go away!

But Crosby would not budge. He begged, he implored, he became confused in trying to explain to her her danger, and at last burst into bitter tears as he felt Lally's fat, moist hand upon his collar, and saw a hereafter peopled with wrathful motherly faces in various stages of disgust and despair.

"You come vid me. I gif you to Riddle. He lock you oop, you bat boy!"

A suppressed giggle of pleasure, at the

thought of neat little Crosby in the hands of the constable, shook Sissy, perched snugly like a malicious little bird in the tree. It served him right, she said to herself gleefully, ascribing the basest motives to Crosby, as one loves to do when one's friends are not in good standing with one's self. He had had no business to hang around and point the way to her hiding-place!

"Oh, I say, Jan, let me off!" begged Crosby, white with terror of the jail—and his lady mother. "I 'll never peek again, sure I won't!"

"Nu! You come vid me. And *you,* too!"

Sissy looked down. Was it possible there was another laggard whom she had not seen?

"I say—you, too!" bellowed Lally. "Vill you come now?"

In the very certainty of security a sudden panic fell upon Sissy. If she only dared to move, to reassure herself! Of course it could n't mean herself—oh!

She felt a sudden tug that almost dislodged her. "You t'ink I don't see—huh?" shouted the perspiring Teuton below. "What for you leave dis trail hang down den—hey?" And he tugged again.

With a sickly remnant of dignity Sissy

stepped down and out. She had forgotten her train—the train that had been at once her pride and her undoing.

"We—I was playing lady," she explained, trembling.

"Oop a tree—huh? Peeking t'rough knot-holes—yes? A fine lady! I fix you."

A glow of defiance came to Sissy's cheeks. "I don't care," she cried, stamping her foot as she stood enthroned on the dry-goods box, her train about her. "It 's a nasty, cruel show, anyway, and you could n't hire me to come and see it. You ought to be ashamed, Mr. Lally! How 'd you like it if your wife was staggering along in there without sleeping or eating for six days?"

Mr. Jan Lally's purple face looked as though it had been slapped. What had Mrs. Lally, with all her babies and busy housekeeping, to do with business? He was so astonished and perplexed by the sudden onslaught that the wriggling Crosby managed to slip out of his grasp, and got to a safe distance before Lally realized it.

"Nu!" he grunted. "I cou' n't hire you—no? Vell, you come mitout hire. I show *you.*"

Sissy felt herself lifted down without ceremony and dragged off. Her round face was

white, her heart was beating like the stamps at the Chollar pan-mill. Yet her train trailed after her still in mock dignity. So did Crosby, at a respectful distance, fearing to follow, yet, though helpless, incapable of desertion. But at the entrance to the opera-house the door was shut in his face.

Sissy and her captor entered. The stage had been built out over the pit, and in the very first row of the dress-circle, the rim of which was the boundary of the contestants' suffering feet, Jan Lally sat down, with Sissy at his side.

Ah, to sit in the front row of the dress-circle! To feel the opulence of one's enviable position, as well as the artistic delight of being properly placed where one could miss nothing, while the brass band outside the opera-house played its third and last quick, jubilant invitation to pleasure—so tantalizing to the outsider, so gratifying to the fortunate one within!

Many and many a time had Sissy Madigan waited, during first and second bands, for some miracle to set her where she now sat! Many a time had the third selection been played, the players with their instruments filed into Paradise, and the poor Madigan peri remained shut outside.

But now Cecilia hung her head, shamed by

being caught; shamed by punishment; shamed trebly by the fact that, apart from those poor sexless, half-maddened machines tottering feverishly around and forever around, she, Sissy Madigan, the proud, the pure, the proper, was the one thing womanly in the house!

It was not a full house by any means, and only the men immediately next to her seemed aware of her presence. Yet, with a consciousness that seared her soul and humbled the pride of the childish prude as with a stain upon her purity, Sissy felt the compounded, composite gaze of man upon woman out of place. It withered, it scorched, it stung her.

But finally Von Hagen, the little German woman, going the round of her maddening treadmill, reached the spot where Sissy sat. The sight of a child there, of a bare, bowed, neat little head in the midst of that inclosure of men's cold eyes, seemed to be the last touch needed to overthrow her tottering reason. She stopped, swaying from the unaccustomed cessation of motion, and held out her arms, smiling vacantly and babbling baby-talk in German as though to a dearly loved little *Mädchen* of her own.

Swift horror piled on Sissy. She had never looked into eyes from which sense had fled,

and the sight stamped itself upon her brain with terrible vividness as food for future nightmares. So frightened was she that she was not aware of Jan Lally's relaxed hold upon her arm, which ached from the tight grip he had had upon it. But when the overtaxed body of the German woman fell in a heap almost at her feet, fright became action in Sissy. She flew past old Jan (his one concern now being for his walking-match), past the knees of the staring men, up the interminable center aisle, her poor train switching behind her as she stumbled, yet ran on, so absorbed by her suffering that she was unaware of the attention her queer little figure attracted, till she was out at last in the free air.

"Well, punish me!" she said, when she found Aunt Anne waiting for her at the head of the long steps fifteen minutes later.

It was a good deal for a Madigan—the nearest they ever got to *mea culpa:* they were not Christians.

Sissy's arrival was hailed by a populous night-gowned world, sent, like herself, supperless for its sins to the purgatory of early bedtime. Split came stealing in from the other room,

bringing Frank along that she might not cry and betray her elder sister's movements—a successful sort of blackmail the youngest Madigan often practised. And later, Kate, looking most conventional and full-dressed in this nightgowned society, brought succor for the starving. They munched chocolate and camped comfortably, three on each bed, while Sissy told her adventures. When she came to the description of Von Hagen's fall, though still shuddering at the memory, she acted the incident so dramatically that Frances set up a howl, which was, however, most fortunately drowned by the ringing of the front-door bell.

Split started to answer it, but her night-gowned state gave her pause. "Perhaps father 'll go," she suggested.

Kate shook her head. "He did n't come to dinner; he 's been shut up in his room all day."

"What 's the matter?" asked Sissy. An old look, that washed all the self-satisfaction from her round face, came over it now.

Kate shrugged her shoulders. "Something he and Aunt Anne talked about to-day," she answered, as she went out into the hall with the air of a martyr.

Sissy looked owlishly after her. Though Francis Madigan rarely ate anything that was

prepared for the family dinner, she could remember the rare times when he had absented himself from it, and feel again the usually ignored undercurrent of the realities upon which their young lives flowed full and free.

But things happened too quickly at the Madigans', and to be preoccupied to the exclusion of one's sisters was one of the forms of affectation not to be tolerated. Split threw a pillow at her head, and the fight was in progress when Kate called for volunteers to bring in a big box from Ireland, left by a drayman who was fiercely resentful of the extraordinary approach to the Madigan house.

Like a lot of white-robed Lilliputians, they tugged and hauled till they got it into the parlor. But when they had lighted the tall, old-fashioned lamp that they called "the light-house" they were disgusted to find that the box was addressed to "Miss Madigan, Virginia City, Nevada, California, U. S. A."

"Some people don't know anything about geography," sniffed Sissy.

"Well,—" Kate had been thinking,—"I 'm Miss Madigan."

"Whoop—hooray!" The shout came from the twins. They were off into the kitchen for Wong's hatchet, and when they pressed it

obligingly into Kate's hand, that young lady saw no way but to make use of it.

"Girls—it 's clothes!" she exclaimed, her starved femininity reveling in the quantity of material before her.

"Boys' clothes," said Split, holding up a full-kneed pair of knickerbockers and a belted jacket. "Well!" With a philosophical grin, she began to put them on.

"And ladies' clothes!" cried Sissy, dragging forth a long black cape. " ' Here would I rest,' " she chanted, draping it about her and lugubriously mimicking Professor Trask as the Recluse in "The Cantata of the Flowers."

"Let 's do it! Let 's sing 'The Flowers,' " cried Irene, shaking herself into some Irish boy's jacket.

"Not much!" Sissy planted herself against the door, as though physical compulsion had been threatened.

"Oh, yes, Sissy," begged Fom. "Bep and I can sing the Heliotrope and Mignonette. Frank can be a Poppy, and we can double up and—"

"I 'll be the Rose," put in Kate, quickly. She had a much-feathered hat on her head and a crocheted lace shawl about her shoulders.

"*I* 'll be the Rose." Split, corrupted by

"'Here would I rest,' she chanted"

her body's boyish environment, stretched her legs apart defiantly. "You can't sing it; you know you can't, Kate. You never could get up to G. If I 'm not the Rose—"

"Oh, well," said Kate, drawing on a pair of soiled, long light gloves she had pulled out of the box, "I 'll be the Lily, then. Come on, Sis."

"I won't," said Sissy, almost weeping. She knew she would. "I won't be the Recluse! I won't be the Recluse every time, just because you two are so greedy and—"

"You know," said Kate, smothering a giggle, but not very successfully, "no one can do it as well as you."

"And it 's really a very important part, and the very first solo," chuckled Irene. "Else why did Professor Trask take it himself?"

"If it 's so important," put in Sissy, grasping at a straw, "you 'd better take it yourself. Why must I always take a man's part? And I can't sing, anyway."

"Why, Sissy!" Split's tone was flattery incarnate, but the irony in her eye made her junior dance.

"You know I can't," she sniffled.

"But my voice and Split's go so well together in the Rose and Lily duet," said Kate,

putting the book of the cantata upon the piano-rack and opening it persuasively.

"You promise me every time," wailed the downtrodden Recluse, reluctantly moving forward, "that I won't have to be it the next time."

"Well, you won't next time," said Kate, generously. "Will she, Split?"

"Well, I won't sing it this time," declared Sissy, seating herself at the piano, yet making a last stand at the very guns.

But Kate and Irene burst forth in the opening chorus with all the verve in the world. The Madigans never scorned expression when it was understood that they were acting. And the twins, still pulling stage properties out of the box, and even Frances, fantastically decorated with a torn Irish lace fichu over the bifurcated, footed white garment she still wore o' nights, joined joyfully in:

> " 'We are the flowers,
> The fair young flowers,
> That come at the voice of spring—'
> DING—DONG!"

It was a familiar old Madigan joke, always greeted with a shriek of laughter, to shout out

the two notes of the accompaniment that punctuated the musical phrases. Its observance now put even Sissy in good humor, so that when the time came for the Recluse to make his appearance, she left the piano, and stalking miserably about with the preliminary cough with which the unfortunate Professor Trask was afflicted, she sang her doleful recitative.

The Madigans were never literalists. They were of the impressionistic school, which requires of the audience, as well as of the artist, high imaginative powers. And here the audience of one moment was the actor of the next, whose duty it was not to mind too closely the letter that killeth, but to mimic irreverently, to exaggerate, to make of themselves caricatures of the mannerisms of others, to nickname, to seize upon every peculiarity with their quick, observant, cruel young eyes and paint it in flesh-and-blood cartoons.

Thus, when the Rose, that "gentle flower in which a thorn is oft concealed," sang her duet with the Nightingale (Sissy trilling weakly on the piano, while Frank fluted her fingers affectedly as she had seen it done that memorable night) it was done in the hollow, throaty tones of the elder Miss Blind-Staggers, who had created the rôle; while the Lily sang

through her nose, which she wiped every now and then in a manner unmistakably that of Henrietta Blind-Staggers.

"The Cantata of the Flowers" was never brought to a glorious completion by the Madigans, even though they skipped uninteresting and difficult parts, and, like the early Elizabethans, permitted no intermission between acts. It was very often laughed to death. At times it became a saturnalia of extravagant action, and it frequently ended in a free fight, when the Rose and the Lily hinted too openly at the Recluse's incurable tendency to sing off key. But that night it might have dragged its saccharine length of melody to the coronation of the Rose and a quick curtain if Miss Madigan had not walked right into the thick of it.

"Golly!" gasped Sissy, while Irene dodged behind Kate, who quickly turned down the lamp, and a hush fell upon the rest.

But Miss Madigan had been writing, or rather rewriting, letters. She had completely forgotten the heinous offense of the afternoon.

"Will you mail a letter for me, Sissy, the first thing in the morning?" she asked, still preoccupied. "Why are you in the dark?"

"We 're just going to bed," remarked Sissy,

with soothing demureness, taking the envelop from her aunt's hand and falling in with her mood, as one does with the mentally afflicted.

When Miss Madigan, fatigued with the labor of composition, had gone back to her room, Kate turned up the light again. "Same thing, I s'pose?" she asked. "Circumstances-letter —huh?"

"I s'pose so. 'T ain't sealed," said Sissy, with resignation. "But she always forgets to seal 'em." Then, suddenly inspired, she caught up Professor Trask's pencil lying on the piano, and on the vacant half-page at the end of Miss Madigan's letter she wrote in her best school-girl hand:

You—whoever you are—need n't bother to answer this. None of us Madigans wants your help or annybody else's. It 't only that Aunt Anne 's got the scribbles, and we 'll thank you to mind your own buisness.

Sissy Madigan.

She read her composition to the startled but, on the whole, approving Madigans, sealed the letter, and was ready for bed.

They were all scampering through the long hall playing leap-frog—a specialty of Split's

which her present costume facilitated—when Francis Madigan, candle in hand, came out of his room on his usual tour of nightly inspection. His short-sighted eyes fell upon Irene, a pretty, lithe, wavy-haired boy, before she and the twins bolted.

"What boy have you got there?" he demanded. "Send him home."

Kate took Frances up in her arms and covered the retreat; she knew how much the better part of valor was discretion.

Sissy remained standing, looking up at him. When she was alone with her father she was conscious of her poor little barren favoriteship, though she dared not impose upon it. In the candle-light his harsh, rugged features stood out marked with lines of suffering.

"It 's all right, father," she said, with a quick choice of the lesser irritation for him. "He 'll go—right away. Good night."

"Good night, child."

But she walked a step or two with him, slipping her hand at last into his, and pressing it tenderly.

"Is—anything the matter, father?" she whispered.

He threw back his head as though some one had struck him. It was not difficult to guess

"She walked a step or two with him"

from whom the Madigans had inherited their fanatical desire to conceal emotion.

Sissy was terrified at what she had done, yet the vague trouble lay quivering before her, though still unnamed, in his working face.

"Father—I 'm sorry," she sobbed.

He pushed her from him, but gently, and she crept into her bed and pulled the clothes over her head, that the twins might not hear her strangled sobbing.

"THE MARTYRDOM OF MAN"

"THE MARTYRDOM OF MAN"

WITH a shrill whistle of recognition, Jack Cody ran down the hill to meet Split toiling up.

The air is like ethereal champagne in Virginia City, and on a late summer's evening, after the sun's honeyed freshness has been strained through miles of it, it has a quality that makes playing outdoors intoxicating.

Split, though, had not been playing. There was business on hand and she had been downtown to buy eggs for the picnic, with the usual result. She had never yet succeeded in bringing home an unbroken dozen, nor did she ever hope to; but she was really out of temper at the extraordinary dampness of the paper bag, to which her two hands adhered stickily. She walked slowly upward, holding the eggs far in front of her like a votive offering to the culinary gods, unconscious of the betraying yellow streaks that beaded her blue gingham apron.

"Where you been, Split?" asked Cody, by way of an easy opening.

"Down to the grocery. Mrs. Pemberton's not laying decently these days."

"Mrs. Pemberton!"

"Sissy's gray hen, you know. Sissy called her that 'cause she 's so stuck-up and thinks she 's better than any other hen in the yard. Besides, she 's got only one chicken, and bosses him for all the world like Crosby."

Cody nodded. "What time you going to start in the morning? Six?"

"Uh-huh." Split dared not lift her eyes from the sticky trail that exuded from her.

"Sure?" the boy demanded.

"Sure—if only father don't keep us so long to-night that we can't get ready. We 've got to be martyred to-night," she added gloomily.

Cody looked his resentment and sympathy. Delicacy and the fear of betraying some social disability on his own part of which he was unaware—some neglect of training which might be considered essential in well-regulated families—forbade his inquiring precisely what the process was. To him "martyring" meant some queer rite whose main and malicious purpose it was to keep Split indoors of an evening when the high mountain twilight was going to

be long, long; and when the moon that followed it would be so brilliant that one might read by its light—if he were n't too wise, and too fond of hide-and-seek—out in the silver-flooded streets made vocal by childish cries.

"But it can't last the whole evening?" he asked appealingly, as she prepared to mount the steps, always accompanied by the silent yellow witness of her passing.

She shook her head hopelessly, sniffing in a manner that showed plainly how little reliance she placed upon the generosity and judgment of adults. And Cody walked away, haunted by the tormenting vision of Split flying before him through the moonlit night: the only girl in town who had any originality about choosing hiding-places, or who could make a race worth while.

The family was assembled when Split reached the library and sat down, rebelliously sullen, beside Sissy. That young woman, though, wore an expression of purified patience, a submissive willingness to kiss the rod, that was eminently appropriate, however infuriating to the junior Madigans. But Sissy had known that it was coming. She could have foretold the martyrdom; all the signs of yesterday prophesied it, and she was reconciled.

It followed invariably that after the rare occasions when the pitiful curtain of his egotism had been blown aside by some chance breeze of destiny, and Francis Madigan had stood for a moment face to face with himself and his shirked responsibilities, he made the spasmodic effort to fulfil his paternal obligations, which the Madigans had learned to call their "martyring." He took from his library the book which had been most to him, which he had read all his life: for inspiration when he had been young and hopeful, for philosophy now that he was old and a failure. He was sincere in offering to his children the fruit of a great mind with comments by one that was sympathetic, able if not deep, and genuinely eager, for the moment, to share its enthusiasm.

But the sight of all this helpless though secretly critical womanhood disposed attentively about him invariably, through association of ideas, brought to his mind every similar and abortive attempt he had made in this direction. When he opened the book to read aloud to them, he was always irritated, with that deep-seated irascibility which has its foundation in self-discontent, however externals may influence or add to it.

Whatever Francis Madigan might have been,

he was never intended for a pedagogue. His impatience of stupidity, his irritation at the slow, stumbling steps of immaturity, not to speak of his lack of judgment in his selection and his determination to persevere in reading aloud from the book of his choice, if he had to ram undigested wisdom whole into the mental stomachs of his offspring—all this would have deterred a less obstinate man. But Madigan, who had become a bully through weakness (forced to domineer unsuccessfully in his home by the conquering softness of his sister's disposition), had the bully's despairing consciousness of being in the wrong at the very moment of superficial victory; of being powerless in the very act of imposing himself upon his poor little women-folk; of recognizing the fact that, although he might lead them to the fountain of knowledge, he was unable to make them drink; and yet not daring to hesitate in his bullying, for fear that he might do nothing at all if he did not do this.

Now that his conscience was quickened, Madigan insisted to himself that the culture of his daughters' minds must be attended to. So he read aloud from "The Martyrdom of Man"; and enjoyed the sound of his voice—the irresistible accents of the cultured Irishman—a

pleasure which the world shared with him; but not a martyred world of small women, over whose heads the long-sounding, musical periods of the poet-historian rolled, dropping only an occasional light shower of intelligence upon the untilled minds below.

"We will begin where we left off the last time," Madigan said harshly. He remembered how long it had been since "last time," and how much his audience had had time to forget. "Where was that? Were any of you interested enough to remember?"

Miss Madigan looked up from her work, like an amiable but very silly hen who pretends to make a mental effort, yet, unfortunately, has nothing to make that effort with. Kate, with the consciousness that she was really the only one of Madigan's children capable of following the line of the historian's thought, flushed guiltily. Irene sat like a prisoner, looking out into the balmy evening. She could hear cries of "Free home! Free home!" from down yonder in the paradise of the streets, in Crosby Pemberton's voice. Even Crosby, whose unnatural mother was the only lady of Split's acquaintance who was prejudiced against playing in the streets—even Crosby was out. While she—

"It was the fall of Carthage, was n't it, father?" asked Sissy, sweetly.

If a glance from Split could have slain, Sissy had been dead. It was not the Madigan policy to encourage Francis Madigan in his belief that the seeds he sought to sow fell on fertile soil. If they had to be martyred in one sense, they declined to be in another. Besides, they knew and detested Sissy's hypocritical desire to "show off."

"It was, indeed, Cecilia," said Madigan, with a pathetic softening of his whole being. " 'T is a fine, stirring, terrible picture the historian gives us of the doomed city. Ahem! . . . 'And then, as if the birds of the air had carried the news, it became known all over northern Africa that Carthage was about to fall. And then, from the dark and dismal corners of the land, from the wasted frontiers of the desert, from the snowy lairs and caverns of the Atlas, there came creeping and crawling to the coast the most abject of the human race—black, naked, withered beings, their bodies covered with red paint, their hair cut in strange fashions, their language composed of muttering and whistling sounds. By day they prowled around the camp, and fought with the dogs for the offal and the bones. If they found a skin,

they roasted it on ashes, and danced around it in glee, wriggling their bodies and uttering abominable cries. When the feast was over, they cowered together on their hams, and fixed their gloating eyes upon the city, and expanded their blubber-lips and showed their white fangs. At last—' ''

A piercing scream came from Frances.

''Thousand devils!'' Madigan burst forth, enraged at the interruption.

It was only that Bep and Fom, in the midst of a finger conversation carried on politely with a deaf-and-dumb alphabet, had had their attention attracted by the ghastly word-picture made so vivid by their father's voice. So, wearying of the innocuous desuetude of things, it occurred to them to present for Frank's entertainment a bodily representation of what the words meant to their minds. Safe in the obscurity of the table-cloth's circular shadow, down on the floor they wriggled, they prowled, they cowered and gloated and expanded their blubber-lips and showed their fangs. If they did not utter abominable cries, it was only because that particular detail was not needed to send the smallest Madigan into hysterics.

''Leave the room!'' cried Madigan. ''Leave the room, you ox!'' looking wrathfully, but generally, down at the disturbance.

And three small Madigans, feeling that they had paid a small price for freedom, crept and crawled to the door—the most abject of the Madigan race till they were fairly outside, when they became the most jubilant.

" 'At last,' " went on Madigan, a lingering growl of resentment in his voice, " 'the day came. The harbor walls were carried by assault and the Roman soldiers passed into—' "

"Father," interrupted Sissy, with the exasperating air of one who knows how soothing she is (like many a talented person, she was irretrievably ruined by her first success and she felt very intelligent)—"father, in what part of Rome was Carthage?"

Behind her father's back Split mouthed a threat of vengeance and shook her fist at the interested Sissy for wilfully prolonging the session. But at Madigan's snort of disgust, the Indian profile of Split, below its bushy crown of red, shone out malevolently. She did not know what Sissy had done; she knew only that she had done something.

Sissy met her glance, and returned it with dignity. "I did n't mean that, father, you know," she said priggishly. "I meant, of course, in what part of Carthage was Rome."

"Oh, you did!" Madigan's smile was not pleasant.

"Ye-es," said Sissy, uncertainly.

"Well," said Madigan, explosively, "Rome was in the same part of Carthage as Carthage was of Rome."

His jaw was set now, and his glowing dark eyes beneath their white shaggy brows as he sought his place in the book were not encouraging. But the enigmatic character of his response was not enough for Sissy, dazed, yet greedy for glory. She glanced from Split, in whose ear Kate was whispering something that seemed vastly to delight her, to her father, who had begun to read again.

"I don't remember, father, please," she said as he paused a moment to clear his throat. "What part was that?"

A sputtering giggle broke from Split. It was unlucky, for it turned Madigan's wrath upon her.

"Outside!" he commanded, pointing to the door. "Outside, you ox! . . ."

" 'Six days passed thus,' " the reading began again. (In almost the moment the door had closed behind her, Split could be heard flying down the outside steps two at a time. That he was sorely tried, Madigan's voice showed plainly, and his shrunken audience looked apprehensively at one another). " 'Six

days passed thus and only the citadel was left. It was a steep rock in the middle of the town; a temple of the god of healing crowned the summit.' The god of healing, Cecilia," he put in, with a contempt that mantled the perfectionist's cheek with a resentful red, "means that particular deity—"

A soft little snore came from Miss Madigan. Her head had fallen to one side, and the lamplight shone on her soft, pretty, high-colored face, placid in its repose as a baby's.

In the moment that Madigan paused and looked at her, Sissy's hand sought Kate's in terror. But the reader controlled himself with an effort, remembering possibly that, after all, it was not his sister but his daughters he was educating.

" 'The rock was covered with people,' " he went on, skipping the explanation he had intended giving to Sissy. And he read on for some minutes without interruption, becoming more and more interested himself in the vivid picture as it unrolled, and half declaiming it in his enthusiasm, with a verve that accounted for Sissy's successful rendition of "The Polish Boy" at school entertainments. " 'The trumpets sounded,' " he sang out. " 'The soldiers, clashing their bucklers with their swords and

uttering the war-cry *Alala! Alala!* advanced in—' ''

''Mercy me!'' exclaimed Miss Madigan, waked by his realistic shout, and blinking her bright little eyes to accustom them to the light.

''Anne,'' said Madigan, tensely, ''if you are not interested, you—are not obliged to listen, of course. But it would be more—civil to withdraw if—''

''Not interested?'' she repeated, with gentle surprise, as she took up her crocheting again. ''Why, it 's very interesting—most interesting; don't you find it so, Kate?''

'' 'A man dressed in purple rushed out of the temple with an olive-branch in his hand,' '' Madigan began again, all the ardor gone from his voice. '' 'This was Hasdrubal, the commander-in-chief, and the Robespierre of the Reign of Terror. His—' ''

''Missy Kate—want chocolate—picnic—'' Wong stood open-mouthed in the doorway. Consciousness of having interrupted the master, as well as amazement at beholding him out of his own room after dinner, was too much for him.

''What do you want, Wong?'' demanded Madigan, harshly.

''Notting—oh, notting,'' murmured Wong,

deprecatingly. "One picnic, sabe, t'-malla morning."

"Irene—I mean Cecilia— Thousand devils! —Kate," stormed Madigan, in his rage forgetting his daughter's precise appellation, "go out into the kitchen and give your orders. If you had the least grain of common sense you 'd know that the first duty of a housekeeper is to have some system about her work; to do things at the right time and not to interrupt the evening's entertainment." He gulped a bit at this, though Kate's dropped lids quickly hid the ironical gleam in her eye. "Well, why don't you go—and stay? You might as well, or you 'll forget something else and interrupt us again."

A desire to make herself look very numerous, intelligent, and appreciative possessed Sissy as the door closed on her big sister. She was in the familiar frame of mind in which she disapproved of her sisters, yet she was terrified lest, if she gave him time, her father might draw the same inference that she had.

"Perhaps you 'll let me read aloud for a while, father. Mr. Garvan often has me read things to the class," she suggested quickly, when she saw he was about to close the book.

Madigan hesitated. A succession of infuriat-

ing trifles had beat upon his temper till it was worn thin. But Sissy's outstretched hand conquered merely by suggestion. He put the book before her, pointed to the place, got to his feet, and began pacing to and fro.

"'Carthage burned seventeen days before it was entirely consumed,'" read Sissy. "'Then the plow was passed over the soil to put an end in legal form to the existence of the city. House might never be built, corn might never be sown, upon the ground where it had stood.'"

She read well, did Sissy, as she did most things. Little by little Madigan's sharp, quick steps became less and less the bodily expression of exasperated nerves, and tuned themselves to the meter of that pretty, childish voice, intelligently giving utterance to the thoughtful philosophy that had always soothed him. It lost some of its familiarity and gained a new charm, coming from that small, round mouth which had an almost faultless instinct for pronunciation. A feeble germ of fatherly pride began to sprout beneath the soil upon which the child's intelligent reading fell like a warm, spring rain.

"One moment, Cecilia." Madigan stopped in his walk, lifting an apologetic hand to ex-

cuse the interruption. "You read just now of 'the Britons of Cornwall gathering on high places and straining their eyes toward the west; the ships which had brought them beads and purple cloth would come again no more.' Now, to what does that refer?"

Sissy's hands flew to her breast; and before she had time to conceal, to pretend, to affect, he had seen the blank expression of her face. You see, she had been merely reading; not thinking. The sound of her own voice had drowned the sense. To read intelligently a thing the comprehension of which was far over her head was the utmost this eleven-year-old could do. She had not the vaguest idea what she had been reading. It was all a blank!

Madigan stood petrified; and the last little martyred ox, stuffing her apron into her mouth, that she might not weep aloud, hurried from the room.

A moment longer Madigan stood. Then he looked at Miss Madigan. That lady's placid face had not changed a particle. She sat crocheting what she called a fascinator, her white bone needle moving harmoniously in and out of the blue wool. Had she heard a word that had been read? Her brother knew better than to ask. Did it make the least difference to

her whether he read from "The Martyrdom of Man" or not?

Madigan shut the book with a bang. The "martyring," boomerang that it had proved, was over.

The world seems new-born every summer morning in Virginia City. This little mining-town, dry, sterile, and unlovely, and built at an absurd angle up the mountain, is the poor relation of her fortunate cousins of the high Alps; yet shares with them their birthright—an open, boundless breadth of view, an endless depth of unpolluted, sparkling air, the fresh, shining virginity of the new-created.

It was the sense of a nature-miracle, and the desire to penetrate still farther and higher into the crystalline sky that crowned it, which sent the Madigans every summer toiling up Mount Davidson. They did not know it, but yearly the *Wanderlust* seized them, and as all things in Virginia point one way, they followed that suggestion—upward.

They were spared the usual struggle with Frances (who, after being coaxed, bribed, threatened, and bullied, had at last annually to be run away from), for the reason that Frank had not slept well after the martyring, and

was still dreaming of creeping, crawling things with blubber-lips and gloating eyes when, in the pellucid dawn, Jack Cody found the Madigans waiting, in clean calicoes, perched on their bottommost step.

The sun was barely over the top of Sugar Loaf, and the town, scantily shrubberied (for water costs as many dollars in Virginia as there are weeks in the year), lay sleeping in soft chill shadow below them, looking oddly picturesque and strange in the unfamiliar light.

"Say," said Cody, "I think I see that Pemberton kid coming up Taylor. Is he coming along?"

"No," said Sissy, promptly.

"Yes," said Split, firmly.

"Well, *I* did n't ask him," from Sissy, with a haughty air of saying the last word. The Madigans were quite accustomed to being social arbiters in their own small world.

"Well, I did," remarked Split, easily.

A pugnacious red overshot Sissy's face. Crosby was her property, to browbeat and maltreat as seemed best to her. She felt that Irene's interference in a matter that was purely personal was unwarranted as it was intolerable.

"He always has such good cream-tarts," explained Split.

"Well, he can have 'em and keep 'em," declared Sissy, savagely, turning her back as Crosby yodled a greeting and waved his hat gaily to her.

Cody grinned. "I think that kid better stay at home. It won't be much picnic for him, will it, Sissy?"

Sissy sniffed. "He 's Split's company," she said loftily. "She 'll make things pleasant for him."

But Crosby, glad to be among the enticing Madigans at any price, and innocently joying in the picnic spirit that possessed him, came whooping to his fate.

"Say," he said eagerly, putting down his basket with the air of one who has a good story to tell, "do you know, I almost got caught this morning. Ma said I was n't to go, but I bet I would n't stay at home. So I told Delia to put up my lunch last night, and to put in a lot of those cream-tarts you like, Sissy—you used to like, Sissy. . . ."

But Sissy, actuated by a delicate desire not to interfere in the slightest with Split's plans for the entertainment of her guest, was deep in conversation with Jack Cody. Crosby's jaw

fell. He saw her give her round tin lunch-bucket—the one he had so often carried to school for her—to Cody, to sling with his own upon a leather strap. And as he watched her start up the ravine carrying one end of the strap, and the washerwoman's boy the other, he wondered passionately within himself at the faithlessness and ingratitude of women.

Was n't it enough to have a reckoning with Madam Pemberton at the end of his day, without having that precious time utterly spoiled? He felt like turning back. Sissy knew well that there could be no picnic for him within the pale of her displeasure. The mountain air might be never so sweet with the wild sage perfuming it; the sun striping the shadowy town below with bloody bands might be never so promising; the mountain's peak, soft and deceitfully near, might be never so tempting—with Sissy chattering gaily in advance, ostentatiously ignorant of his very existence, the glory was cut out of Crosby's morn. It seemed, too, to him that he had never been so fond of her. His mother's disapproval of this Madigan since a certain episode (to avenge which cruel Sissy's thirst could never be slaked) had put the last touch to his devotion. That matron's pleasure in their intercourse hitherto had been the one

drawback to his delight in it. In his eyes, his inamorata walked now with the crown of the forbidden upon her haughty little head; and that Crosby was more of a natural boy than his effeminate tastes indicated is proven by the fact that he loved Sissy far more for this than for being "the good one" his mother had once thought and proclaimed her.

At the sluice-box which circles Mount Davidson, bringing the purest of water from a mountain lake, the party halted and was joined by other brave mountaineers, big and little; the latter in calico skirts, and shirts and knickerbockers. Bombey Forrest was the only one who came under neither of these heads. She was a slender slip of a girl whose mother, to the scandal of conventional folk, believed that for the first decade or so of child-life the boy's costume is fitter than the girl's. So Bombey wore a knickerbockered sailor-suit with a broad collar and white braid; wore it with a bit of a conscious air, yet with that grace which long use and habit lend; with piquancy, too, for she was the least masculine of girls in mind and manner, and her delicate face with its golden curls bloomed like a flower on a strange stalk, above the assertive masculinity of her attire.

It was to Bombey that Crosby Pemberton

turned for solace. (Split had promptly deserted him for Kate, whom she suspected of a contemptible desire to cut loose from the Madigans as children, and join the older members of the party.) He had not had the courage to forgo the picnic, though he knew his mistress well enough to be sure that by the end of the day he would realize that that course would have been the least painful. He carried Bombey's basket, like the little gentleman he was; not in the division-of-labor fashion, from which Cody's and Sissy's jangling buckets extracted a sort of cow-bell music as they ran merrily along, far in advance.

Cody spied the two below when he and Sissy sat down to rest on a huge boulder. Jack never knew how to treat Bombey Forrest, always feeling that the most decent thing to do was not to look at her. Despite his own bitter and recurring experiences (which, one might fancy, would have made him tender to the vicissitudes of sex as warranted by clothing), something in him felt outraged and resentful at the sight of her.

"Look at the girl-boy and the boy-girl!" he sneered. "See how they poke along. They 'll never get to the top."

Sissy's shoes were hot and dusty. The

strong odor of sage-brush was in her nostrils. Her skirt was torn, and the short-stemmed desert-lilies she held in a moist hand were wilted. But she was happy, for she was outdoing, she was pretending, and she was punishing. The only thing that detracted from her pleasure was to be obliged to concur in Cody's opinion. That roused her perversity. She loved to lead or to oppose—not to agree.

"Let 's go on," she said imperiously. "What are you stopping for?"

As the sun climbed higher, the mountain's top got farther and farther away. But Cody, who had scaled not only its summit, but the flagpole that tipped it, knew its habit of piling one small hill up behind the other, as though, like a grotesque Gulliver playing a practical joke, it delighted in fatiguing and disappointing the Liliputians that swarmed up from its base. Crosby and Bombey and the twins, with the Misses Blind-Staggers,—blinder than ever to-day for the glare on their blue goggles,—had yielded long since. They were camping patiently in a ravine far below, where a tiny spring hinted at dining-room conveniences. The rest of the party, with Irene revenging herself upon Kate's disloyalty by sticking like a burr to that young lady (whom, Split

thought, Mr. Garvan was treating altogether too much like a young lady), was close on the vanguard's heels. And Sissy and Cody, panting now, but toiling doggedly on, had reached the cool little cup-shaped hollow in the cone where the snow lies.

From here to the top was but a few minutes' run. Cody was all for halting and snow-balling the party as it came up, but Sissy was too exhausted to stop now.

"We 'll rest at the top of the hill," she decided impatiently, and hurried him on, both a bit out of temper.

No beauty of winding river and peaceful valley checkered with fields of grain, no low-lying gardens and climbing forests, reward the scaler of the heights behind the Comstock—only the bare little brown town far down, digging tenacious heels into the mountain's side and propped up with spindle-shanked foothold, the great white inverted cones of steam rising from the mines, the naked and scarred majesty of the gray mountains all about, the desert gleaming like a lake in the east, and Washoe Lake gleaming like a desert in the west.

Yet Sissy held her breath. Something in the still purity of the air, the savage grandeur of the mountains, the great arch of liquid blue

above her, caught and held her impressionable spirit. She stretched out her hands—a small, petticoated Balboa—to the world she had discovered. "It—it makes you want to scream," she stammered.

"Booh!" It was a yell from Cody, delivered full in her ear. "If you want to scream, darn it, scream!" was his practical advice as he spat out the sunflower-seeds he had been chewing and prepared to climb the pole.

Sissy stood looking at him, the color flooding her face. And as he noted her expression, the boy suddenly remembered that he did not like Split's sister. But his mild memory of distaste was as nothing to the disgust that possessed Sissy. In her ecstasy she had unwittingly lifted a corner of the lid that she kept tight over her emotions. Logically, she hated the unimpressed and profane witness of the phenomenon.

She turned her back on him, refusing even to look at his progress up the high pole. She would not see when, at its top, small as a fly at the point of a pencil, he waved his hat and, ululating brassily, gave vent to the desire to be noisily vocal which had clutched Sissy's throat into silence. At luncheon, she found a spot that was farthest from him; and when he and

Split tore noisily down the mountain's side on the way back, she submitted rather to be outdone than to join a party of which he was one.

Crosby Pemberton, bracing himself for the derision he expected from her, was delighted to see her come sliding down alone to the ravine, where the successful ones paused to take up the rest of the party. Her solitary state encouraged him, and he sought her where she sat knocking the sand out of her shoe.

"Sissy," he said softly, holding out a peace-offering, "I saved some cream-puffs for you."

But the ruthless Sissy was not to be so easily placated. "You mean for Split, don't you?" she said, scarcely looking at him, and diligently lacing her shoe. "She asked you to come, you know. I did n't."

With the look of a wounded dove, Crosby turned, and Sissy saw Irene a moment later, her teeth gluttonously closed over one of Delia's biggest puffs, a heart-breaking amount of "filling" gushing over her cheeks and chin.

But to do without for the sake of principle was ever rapture to the purist. Sissy placed the pangs of desire to the credit side of Crosby's account; this was only one thing more she owed her victim. In fact, as the party started on, so engaged was she in inventing and

perfecting tortures for him that she followed the procession on its unusual detour without demur. It was only when it was too late that she saw Bullion Ravine ahead of her, and the swaying high trestle over which the flume is carried.

Split's malicious face as that most sure-footed of Madigans touched the first plank made Sissy realize the test to which she was to be put. Her terror of giddy heights was treated as an absurd affectation by the steady-headed Madigans, and as such requiring discipline, which, with truly sisterly foresight, Split had provided. She ran across now with the joy of a thing that feels itself flying. Jack Cody turned a handspring in the very middle; and the sight so nauseated Sissy that she had to stand aside and let those immediately behind her pass first. Yet she dared not remain till the last, for a panicky picture in her mind showed her to herself paralyzed forever on the brink. As she put her foot on the first board, beneath which she could hear the running water chuckling and gurgling as it ran, she swore to herself that she would not look down. And, indeed, she did keep her eyes on Crosby Pemberton's straw hat, as he walked some distance in front of her. But the moment his foot

touched the ground on the other side, the light structure, relieved of his weight, changed its rhythmic swaying, which had measured the steady strength of his step. Its rebound, exaggerated by Sissy's tense nerves, seemed sickeningly high; its fall ghastly low. Swung there from mountain to mountain, its slender supports looked frail as a spider's woof, and seemed to tremble with every gasping breath she drew. In spite of herself, her eye caught the silvery glitter of the thread of water far below in the stony bed of the nearly dry creek.

It was all over with Sissy. Trembling with terror, she sat down, clutching the edge of the board beneath her, the world swimming away before her shut eyes, just as it did when one looked too long through a knot-hole at the flowing race in the flume beneath.

Irene's giggle came faintly to her; she was too terrified to resent it. The murmur of voices that called her name, encouragingly, warningly, angrily, was not so loud as the chuckling of the water in the box which seemed to hurry her senses away. She lived through years of agony, in which she found herself wishing that she could only fall and end it. Then she felt the trestle bound beneath her, and she was waked by the touch of Crosby's hand.

"Get up!" he said in a tone of command that reminded her of that grenadier his mother.

She opened her eyes and saw that his face was white, but the glitter of determination in his eyes was so new and curious that it held her attention for the moment necessary to give her strength to obey. He almost pulled her to her feet, and then half dragged, half ran with her across. Yet within ten feet of the end, the trembling of his hand had communicated itself to her whole body. She watched the drops of perspiration fall from his pale face and, fascinated, followed them down with her eyes. Then wrenching her hand from his, she almost fell down again. It seemed to her her head swayed back and forth with such force as might bear her whole body with it, and she squatted down, shivering.

It was a most humiliating finish to an exciting adventure, for when he strove to compel her again to rise, Crosby found that terror is contagious. He himself dared not stand. He squatted down in front of her, and on all fours the two crawled toward the bank. Sissy could have kissed the earth when her hands touched it.

But it took her some time to recover. The sympathetic fussing of the Misses Bryne-Stivers she endured as in a dream. She even per-

mitted Mr. Garvan to take her hand and help her walk for a time. But when they reached the first house and had turned down Taylor Street, she was so thoroughly herself that she contrived to let the rest pass her, and she rested till Crosby came up. She was walking beside him, with a sudden flattering kindness that almost turned his head, when he looked in the direction in which her eyes were fixed, and saw his mother in her phaeton pull up and beckon to him.

He looked shyly at Sissy. He would have given much to be told that this forgiveness was not to be merely temporary, like others that had preceded it whenever Mrs. Pemberton might see and disapprove; that he was no longer to be flouted and scorned when there was nobody but Sissy herself to be glad of it.

"The shadow of the guillotine is over you!" said Sissy, in a bombastic whisper addressed to Mrs. Pemberton—a comforting formula the Madigans had invented to still their envy of those who rode in carriages. But her smiling face, when it turned toward Crosby, had no threat in it.

Relieved, forgiven, reinstated,—for there was a promise without words in his tyrant's good humor,—Crosby laughed out gaily. At

that moment he had no more fear for Madam Pemberton than for the invoked Madame Guillotine.

"S' long, Sissy," he cried, waving his basket to her as he went, a young aristocrat, to meet his fate.

That night Sissy said her prayers in a rush. She wanted to give her undivided attention to plans of revenge on Split.

KATE: A PRETENSE

KATE: A PRETENSE

THE lesser Madigans meant to stand no nonsense from Kate. Other girls' big sisters had been known to assume superiority as their skirts lengthened, and to imply an esoteric something in their experience which younger sisters could not comprehend, and privileges which they might not share. But for them, the Madigans, though they were graciously willing to count Kate out of such outdoor sports as were incompatible with lengthened skirts, she might come no pretense of young-ladyhood over them. They were on the watch for the smallest affectation, the least sentimentality; and as for beaus per se—just let Kate try it!

Kate did, being human, a Comstock girl when girls were in a delightful minority, and a Madigan. But, realizing the argus-eyed watch put upon her, and the forthright methods of her sister Madigans, she tried it secretly.

To be sure, there was old Westlake,—he was at least thirty-five years old —whose intentions

were quite apparent. He came up to play whist at the house whenever he was in town, upon which occasions Kate was always his partner; and he scolded her with the same proprietary freedom for leading a "sneak" suit as Francis Madigan did his sister—a lady who was never known to know what was trumps, and who smiled and blinked and blushed and made the same mistakes over and over again with a complacency that Madigan's fiercest thumps upon the table could not shake.

But the Madigans forgave Kate her Westlake, for the pleasure she took in guying him, and the loyal frankness with which she let them into all the moves of the game. He was "The Avalanche" to her and to them, because of his avoirdupois, his slow movements, and the imperviousness to a joke with which he was credited; because he could not take in all the little infinity of homely facetiæ in which the Madigans lived and had their being. Besides, it was pleasant and exciting, being leagued with Kate against Aunt Anne, who was known to have positively had the indecency to speak openly upon the subject, and in favor of it, to her oldest niece!

"Fly, the Avalanche is upon you!" was Sissy's dramatic way of warning her big sister

that her suitor had been spied by the outpost coming up the steps.

And on such occasions Kate could slip out of the side door and be safely inside the Misses Blind-Staggers's sitting-room by the time Westlake's heavy step made the porch shake—and Sissy, too—with laughter. But this was before she went to open the door.

"Is your sister at home?" old Westlake asked confidently.

"Which one—Irene? Yes, she 's home." Sissy's small round face was simplicity and candor incarnate.

" No," said old Westlake, uncomfortably. He had seen shrewdness once or twice behind the eyes where innocence now dwelt, and he only half trusted this demure, blank-faced child. "I mean your sister Katherine."

"Oh!" Cecilia exclaimed, in gentle surprise. "Oh, no, sir, she 's out."

"Indeed!"

Old Westlake fancied he heard a mocking "indeed" that followed. In fact, an echo that had the queer effect of making him hear double seemed to accompany all his words. It came from the portières, which were suspiciously bulky, and shook as though something more than the wind moved them.

"And how soon will she be home?" he asked.

"Kate? You mean Kate? Oh, I really do not know." Sissy pronounced her words with pedantic care—a permissible thing among Madigans when adults were to be guyed.

Old Westlake (he was rather a handsome old fellow, with his regular features, his blond mustache, and prominent blue eyes) fidgeted uneasily. There must be some way, he felt, of moderating this half-chilly, half-critical atmosphere on the part of the smaller Madigans. But children were riddles to him, and the solutions his small experience offered were either too simple or too complex.

"She can't be intending to spend the whole day out?" he asked, conscious that he presented a ridiculous figure to the childish gray eyes lifted to his.

"No, I don't suppose she can," agreed Sissy. "Won't you come in?"

He followed her hesitatingly into the parlor and sat down, his eyes fixed upon the portières over the front windows, which still appeared to be strangely agitated.

"You—do you think it will be worth while —my waiting?" he asked helplessly, as Cecilia was modestly about to withdraw.

She looked up at him with the bland look of

intelligence which it takes a clever child to counterfeit.

"Worth while waiting for Kate?" she asked in accents half puzzled, half reproachful.

Old Westlake blushed to the roots of his close-cropped fair hair. He fancied he heard a muffled gurgle behind the portières that was n't soothing.

"Oh—you mean, is she likely to come home soon?" added Sissy, gravely, eying his discomfiture. "I really do not know."

"Is Miss Madigan in?" asked the desperate man.

"Why, do you call her that? I told you she was out."

"No; you told me Katherine was out. Is she in?" he asked eagerly.

Sissy stared at him stupidly. He returned her stare contemplatively. He yearned to bribe her, but he did n't dare. She looked too old to be bought, too young to understand; yet he was sure she was neither.

"Katherine, Kate, and Miss Madigan are out," said Sissy, didactically. "So are Kitty, Kathleen, and even Kathy—that 's her latest; she wrote it that way in Henrietta Bryne-Stivers's autograph-album."

The visitor looked bewildered. "I asked

you whether your aunt is in,'' he said, with some impatience.

''I beg your pardon,'' retorted Sissy, ceremoniously. No Madigan begged pardon unless intending to be doubly offensive thereafter. ''You asked me whether my sister was in.''

''Is—your—aunt—in?'' demanded Westlake, with insulting clearness.

''She—is—in. I 'll—tell—her—you 're—here.''

''Please.'' Westlake bit the word out, promising himself that his first post-nuptial act would be to shake this small sister-in-law well for her impertinence.

And this was the pathos, as well as the absurdity of old Westlake—he was so confident.

But he was not so confident that he did not long for an ally. And when Split stepped out from behind the portières, with a barefaced pretense of having just come through the long French window from the porch, he straightway invited her to go to the circus that evening with him and Kate.

There happened to be two sties on Split's left eye just then, and a third on the upper eyelid of the right one. But this, of course, was no reason for discouraging the overtures of a poor old man like Westlake, who, it appeared to Split, had some virtues, after all.

That evening Sissy, who was playing holey down on Taylor (a famous button-string had Sissy, as token of her prowess; it had a sample of almost every buttoned frock worn in Virginia for the past ten years), watched the three as they set out for the tent far down at the foot of the hill. And three things occurred to her, as she stood looking after them, Bombey Forrest waiting vainly, meanwhile, for her to shoot: First, that if his desire was to propitiate the clan, old Westlake had selected the wrong Madigan: Split being not nearly so tenacious an enemy nor so loyal a friend as herself. Second, that that same Split looked "like a silly" with the white handkerchief bound over her left eye, and her right one swollen and teary. She wondered, did Sissy, that they should take such a fright with them. And thirdly, the censor of the family sins made a mental note to the effect that Kate Madigan was putting on altogether too many airs as she pulled on her gloves; there was an inexcusable self-consciousness about her manner toward the Avalanche; and as for old Westlake himself, he was clearly taking advantage of Split's blindness and casting such glances at that giddy Kate as she, Sissy, would certainly not have tolerated—if she had been invited to go to the circus. If only she had!

It must not be supposed that the esthetic side of life for the Madigans was represented wholly by women's walking-matches and the circus. There was also the Tridentata.

Of course the Tridentata—the name was supposed to have something to do with sage-brush—was very select. Naturally, for it had had its origin in Mrs. Pemberton's strenuous estheticism and double parlors—possessions of which few Comstockers could boast. But after the infant literary society had learned to stand alone, it adopted migratory habits, meeting now at the Misses Bryne-Stivers's cottage, now at Mrs. Forrest's over-furnished rooms, and occasionally even at the Madigans'.

There was at least room enough at the Madigans'; it was the one particular in which they were never stinted. The long, shabby parlor had sufficient seating-capacity, even if the chairs were not all, strictly speaking, presentable.

"Shall I bring in the Versiye fotoy?" asked Split on one of the occasions when the meeting of the Tridentata necessitated a real house-cleaning in which the full corps of Madigans took part.

"The Versailles *fauteuil,* Irene," replied Miss Madigan, doubtfully, "is not reliable. If

I was n't sure that Mrs. Pemberton, who has seen the real ones, would be sure to ask where it is, I 'd keep it out; for the last time she came so near sitting on it while I was reading my paper on 'Home-keeping' that I got so nervous I left out all that part about the housewife's duty being, above all, to make a spiritual home: to diffuse about herself a home atmosphere, so that wherever she sat, wherever two or three gathered about her, there was the Sanctuary of the Church of Home, so to speak. And—''

''Then you want me to bring it in?'' Split had too much to do to listen to Tridentata culture. Her humble office was merely to make ready for the literary feast and modest bodily refreshment to come.

It was one of the contradictions of Split's nature—her intense occasional domesticity and the practical good sense that marked her home economies. She rose now, basin in hand. Her sleeves were rolled up, her bushy hair, a troublesome half-length now, was bound up in a towel. She had been scrubbing and polishing the zinc under the stove, and she was as happy as she was executive. She flew about trilling ''The Zingara,'' with a smudge on her chin and a big kitchen-apron tied about her waist, looking like a dirty little slavey; yet putting the

mark of her thoroughness upon everything she touched and Miss Madigan overlooked.

"The big rug from your room is to go over the hole by the window?" she asked perfunctorily, being half-way through the hall at the time.

"Oh, I 'm so glad you remembered it," said Miss Madigan. "Mrs. Forrest tripped in that hole the last time. I thought it was exceedingly impolite of her to call attention to it that way, because—"

"Shall I turn the couch-cover?" demanded Split.

"I don't see how you can," said Miss Madigan, helplessly. "It 's worn on the other side."

But with a tug Split had drawn it off, pillows and all, and she flew up-stairs, carrying Kate in her wake to help her pull down a portière which she intended transforming into a couch-cover.

Things sentient as well as material were accustomed to doing double duty at the Madigans' on Tridentata nights. When Francis Madigan, forewarned that his bell would often be rung that evening, but that he was not expected to resent the insult, had retreated to his castle and pulled up the drawbridge behind him, the slavey, with Sissy as assistant, became

doorkeeper, and, later, butler. Critics, of course, these two were ex officio; and from their station out in the chilly hall, they listened to and mocked at the literary program, which Miss Madigan had entitled, "A Night of All Nations."

The opening duet between Maude and Henrietta Bryne-Stivers they had heard before. Few people in Virginia, indeed, had not.

"Trash!" Sissy pronounced it in Professor Trask's best manner.

The reading from "Sodom's Ende," in the original, by the traveled Mrs. Pemberton, was fiercely resented by her audience outside the gates. It always made a Madigan furious to hear a foreign tongue; for, apart from the affectation of strange pronunciations, the deliberate mouthing of words (and you could n't make Sissy Madigan believe that Mrs. Ramrod understood half of what she was reading in that guttural, heavy tongue), there was the impugnment of other people's lack of linguistic accomplishment.

The critical paper on Daudet that followed was read by Miss Henrietta Bryne-Stivers. While it was in progress the two Madigans out in the hall each read an imaginary paper on the same topic, finishing with that identical

courtesy which Henrietta had imported from Miss Jessup's school in the city. But Split tripped Sissy as she was bowing over low, and she fell, as softly as she could, to the floor. Miss Madigan looked out with a "S—sh!" Sissy cast off all blame in virtuous dumb-show, and in the pause the two heard Dr. Murchison's voice as Henrietta passed him and the door, on her triumphant way back to her seat.

"Allow me to compliment you, Miss Henrietta," said the old doctor, pleasantly excited by so youthful a lady's literary discrimination. "You are really fond of Daudet, then?"

Henrietta blushed. "Oh, no, indeed, doctor!" she said deprecatingly. "At Miss Jessup's we girls were not permitted to read him, you know."

"Ah, I see," murmured the doctor. "Only to write about him?"

"Miss Jessup thought it was more—fitting, with the French authors," observed Henrietta.

"So it is," agreed Murchison, dryly. "So it is. The excellent Miss Jessups—how well they know!"

"He 's guying her," chuckled Sissy, making a mental vow to read Daudet or die in the attempt. "And she does n't know it."

"Hush!" came from Split.

In a tenor a bit foggy, but effectively sympathetic, old Westlake was singing, "Oh, would that we two were maying!"

Sissy put her eye to the crack of the door, and Split, watching her, saw her round face grow red and indignant.

"What is it?" she whispered, squirming till she too had an eye glued to the crack.

"Look!" exclaimed Sissy, disgustedly.

Straight in their line of vision sat Kate, and upon her old Westlake's eyes were ardently fixed as he sang.

"It 's—it 's not decent," declared Sissy, wrathfully.

"He does look like a calf." Split grinned. Kate looked very pretty in that white cashmere embroidered in red rosebuds, which had been made over from the box from Ireland, Split said to Sissy, and so was deserving of forgiveness, she hinted; for when one had a new frock—

Sissy, the sensible, snorted unbelievingly. What gown had ever affected her?

"But I 'll get even with him," she said, stealing on tiptoe down the hall. "Just you watch!"

Split, her nose in the crack of the door, watched. The Avalanche had finished his first

verse and begun the second, when Sissy appeared in the parlor, very modest and retiring, walking behind chairs and effacing herself with an ostentation that could not but attract all eyes. She stopped at Miss Madigan's chair, asked a question,—which Split knew well was utterly irrelevant and immaterial,—and received an answer in Aunt Anne's company manner: a compound of sweetness and flustered inattention which no one could mimic better than Sissy herself.

Then she withdrew, slowly and by a tortuous route which brought her just beside him at the moment Westlake stopped singing. Without a word, yet with a gracious instinct for the momentary confusion in which the performer found himself, his seat having been taken while he sang, Cecilia pulled out another from the wall and moved it slightly toward him.

The little attention was offered so naturally, with such engaging demureness, that Mrs. Pemberton—whom the social amenities in children ever delighted—almost loved Sissy Madigan at that moment. So, by the way, did Split, out in the hall, her eye at the crack of the door, her feet lifting alternately with anticipative rapture. For it was the Versailles *fauteuil* that Sissy had so sweetly selected for old Westlake.

And when the big fellow came down to earth with a crash, rising red and confused from the debris, Sissy was already out in the hall. She arrived at the crack in time to see Kate stuff her handkerchief into her mouth and hurry to the window, her shoulders shaking, while Miss Madigan flew to the rescue.

It took a recitation in Italian by Mrs. Forrest to rob Sissy Madigan, judge and executioner, of her complacency after this. Then Aunt Anne recited "The Bairnies Cuddle Doon" charmingly, as she always did, but most Hibernianly, with that clean accent that makes Irish-English the prettiest tongue in the world. After which she received with smiling complacency the compliments of Mrs. Forrest, who told her that an ideal mother had been lost to the world in her.

Outside, two cynics listened with a bored air. They felt that they required a stimulant after this, so they made a hurried visit to the dining-room, thereby escaping Mr. Garvan's reading of "Father Phil's Collection." But when Henrietta Bryne-Stivers delivered "Blow, Bugle, Blow," changing from speaking voice to the sung chorus with a composure that was really shameless, the critics out in the hall received that insulting shock which novelty

inflicts upon the provincial, which is the childish, mind. They revenged themselves in their own way, mouthing and attitudinizing, caricaturing every pose which Miss Henrietta had been taught, by the instructor of Delsarte at Miss Jessup's, was grace. They were caught in the midst of their saturnalia of ridicule by Kate, who promptly exploded at their uncouth, dumb merriment.

"Aunt Anne wants you, Sissy," she said when she got her breath.

In an instant Sissy was sobered. It was n't possible that she was to be sent to bed before supper! To be a waiter was the height of happiness for Sissy.

"It 's because of the Versiye fotoy," giggled Split, as she ran off to the dining-room.

"It is n't, is it?" whispered Sissy to Kate. And Kate shook her head reassuringly, and waved her in. She could n't answer audibly, for Dr. Murchison was tuning up his sweet old violin, while Maude Bryne-Stivers offered to accompany him on the piano.

But Murchison knew too much of the manners and methods of Jessup's Seminary, as revealed by its showiest pupil.

" Thank you, thank you, Miss Maude, but this is a very old-fashioned and a very simple

entertainment I 'm going to give. Just the things that I play to myself when I 'm weary of listening to humanity tell of its ills and aches—the egotist! Then I look down into the beautifully clean inside of my fiddle, its good old mechanism without a flaw, and listen to the things it has to tell. . . . Thank you, just the same, Miss Maude; this is not a theme worthy of your brilliant rendition, but, as I said, a simple, old-fashioned playing of the fiddle. I 'll supply the old-fashioned part, and Sissy here can do the simple accompaniment, if she will."

If she would! Sissy was so gaspingly happy and proud that she forgot even to pretend that she was n't. Seating herself, she let her trembling fingers sink into the opening chord, while the old doctor's bow sought the strains of "Kathleen Mavourneen," of "Annie Laurie," the "Blue Bells of Scotland," and "Rose Marie."

The unspoken sympathy that existed between these two flowed now from the bow to Sissy's fingers, and made a harmony as pretty as was the sight of the old man and the happy child looking up at him. Sissy Madigan was conscious that the doctor knew her—almost; that, nevertheless, she occupied a place quite unique in his heart. And she loved passionately to be

loved, this hypocrite of a Madigan, who jeered and jibed at any demonstration of affection. A sense of being utterly at harmony with the world possessed her now; the fact that she was "showing off" was far, far in the background of her consciousness, when all at once she happened to glance out through the hall door.

She had left it ajar behind her, expecting Kate to follow her in. But Kate, evidently, had not followed. She stood out there alone with Mr. Garvan, her arms behind her, her slender figure drawn up beneath the swinging hall lamp, her pert little head, circled by the braids she wore coiled clear around it when she wanted to be very grown-up, upturned to the master, her every feature stamped with coquetry.

Sissy shut her lips firmly—and the wrong note she struck marred the doctor's finale. It was evident that Kate Madigan needed looking after.

She did; and yet no one but Kate and those she experimented upon could help her to find herself.

A wilful Madigan, intoxicated with her first taste of a new pleasure, was Kate. She had outgrown her short skirts with regret; she was preparing to make them still longer with de-

light. She had the maturity of her motherless and quasi-fatherless state to add to the natural precocity of the mining-town girl, and of the eldest sister who has been pushed out of her childhood by the press of numbers behind her. And yet the wine of romance kept her almost babyishly young. She had a way of proclaiming the fact that she read everything her father did. (Madigan, marooned by his misfortunes in the most picturesque setting, where men were living the most picturesque lives, turned his back upon it all and found the action his dull days were denied in the elder Dumas.) By this Kate intended to show how proud and unrestrained a Madigan was; hoped, too, perhaps, that there might attach a bit—the least bit—of suggestive license to the phrase. And all the while she was pitiably unconscious of how innocuous the old romanticist's tales of adventure may be, read in translation, by the light of such purity and innocence as hers.

But she was pert, was Kate, and piquant; she presumed upon her youth, upon her age. She was a child when you expected her to be a woman, and a woman where you looked for the child. No dream of romance was romantic enough to hold her fickle soul constant to it—to satisfy the hopes of her heart. Every man

she met was a prince; yet was he, too, bare and poor and mean compared with The Man to come. The child in her was gauche and crude, sitting in judgment—as cynical, as critical a spectator as Sissy herself—upon the very hopes the woman awakened. In her eyes the flash of coquetry was succeeded by the blank, childish irony which denied the emotion hardly passed. She loved to shock pretense, yet she was the most absurd and innocent of pretenders, for the terms in which convention speaks were Greek to her. She was masterful, being a Madigan, and daring and impertinent. A creature utterly impatient of forms, with a boy-like chivalry, revealing how incomplete the work of sex was yet, for the woman misunderstood—whom she, in her crude purity, understood least of all. This was Kate, ready, at fifteen, to battle single-handed with windmills, with world-old problems, with world-young prejudices; to burn intolerance to ashes in the white flame of her brave young innocence; to cry aloud the word that older, wiser cowards whisper or stifle in their hearts; to make no compromise; to know that black is black and white is white; to be unforgiving, as only cruel young inexperience can be; to flame at a wrong and glow at its righting; and yet to have her contradic-

tions cased in a body of such vivid grace, a mind leavened by humor, and a heart of such sweetness as made her the irresistibly lovable Pretense she was.

Pretending to be a child, to annoy her Aunt Anne; pretending to be a woman, to infuriate her younger sisters; pretending to be a saint, pretending to be a sinner; pretending to scorn the world, yet quaffing its first sweet draughts of individual power and experience with full-opened throat; pretending to be mannish—driven to that extremity by the super-femininity of Henrietta Bryne-Stivers; pretending to be frivolous, to shock rigid Mrs. Pemberton; pretending to be a blue-stocking with a passion for the solid and heavy in literature; pretending to be a Spartan who must rise at dawn and, after a plunge in ice-cold mountain water, climb, with only big Don, the Newfoundland, for company, up to the sluice-box; there to pretend she was an esthete to whom the sunrise, while she communed alone with nature, revealed things invisible to the world below.

But Reality's day came. Miss Madigan went out into the future, sent thither by her auntly sense of responsibility, and brought it back with her. It led them straight to Warren Pemberton's office, and Pretense fled like a shy

shadow before the sun when Reality looked at her through Pemberton's cold, dull eyes.

"Miss Madigan, Mr. Pemberton. My niece Kate," was the lady's introduction as they entered.

The red-faced, heavy little man, too important a personage to be expected to contribute socially to the life of the town, had been looking at Miss Madigan as though he knew he ought to remember having met her. She wanted something, of course. Everybody wanted something from Warren Pemberton, King Sammy's viceroy, in charge of his mining interests and his political plantations. But he brightened at the formula, recollecting having heard it before from the same lady's lips, and promptly placed her in the category of small political favors.

"I remember you, Miss Madigan—of course," he stammered. "Remember the little girl, too. Crosby's flame, eh?"

Kate flushed, struck dumb with the insult, and her black-gray eyes gleamed handsomely with anger. After getting herself up in her most mature fashion to be mistaken for Sissy!

"Why, Mr. Pemberton," exclaimed Miss Madigan, flustered by propinquity to greatness,

"this is Kate, the Miss Madigan who—for whom—"

"Oh, excuse me." Pemberton sat rubbing his chin and silently blinking at the Miss Madigan for whom his influence had been invoked. She felt he was weighing her youth and inexperience against the thing that had been asked for her. And the Madigan in her fiercely resented it; was tempted to confirm his doubts by a saucy flippancy that would relieve her impatience of a false position. But there was that other Madigan in her to be reckoned with, that new one, on the reverse of whose shining, romantic shield a plain, dull, tenacious sense of duty was slowly spelling itself into legibility.

"Kate 's really very clever, Mr. Pemberton," said Kate's aunt, tactfully; and the girl's teeth clicked together, in her effort to control her irritation. "And in some ways she is much older than her years. She will graduate, you know, this year at the head of her class; she passed first in the examination, and really, in a family where there are so many girls—"

"Yes, yes, I know," interrupted the great man. "You told me all about that, and I—"

"And you 've had time to realize just how extraordinary a creature I am and how pitiful a case ours is! Am I too brilliant altogether to

be wasted on school-teaching?'' Wrath tingled in Kate's voice. She heard Miss Madigan's gasp of horror, and could imagine the fishy disconsolateness of her expression. And she saw the red-faced little man opposite her start, as at the injection of a foreign tongue into the interview.

''Eh—what? Oh, yes,'' he said dully. ''I mean—no. It 'll be—it 's all right.''

''Oh, Mr. Pemberton, how can I thank you!'' Miss Madigan clasped her hands.

''Yes; I spoke to Forrest yesterday, and—and, of course, Murchison 's willing,'' went on the little man, gravely. ''But there 's no vacancy just now, so they 'll arrange to appoint substitutes. It 's the way they do in cities, I understand. And Miss Cecilia here will be—''

''My name, Mr. Pemberton, is Kate!''

''And Kate 's exceedingly grateful.'' Miss Madigan gazed amazed at her niece; she did n't look grateful.

''Not at all; not at all,'' murmured Pemberton, feeling for his papers helplessly. ''I 'm so busy—''

''It—is good of you,'' stammered Kate, rising. ''I am—very much obliged to you.'' She held out a hand to him that was cold to the finger-tips. All at once she felt so old, so

young, so niched forever in a somber, gray life, so settled, so bound up by small formalities, so miserably unlike a Madigan!

Yet the Madigan in Kate waked with a defiant brightness when the first call came that took her temporarily over the threshold of the new life. She left her own school-room, where her rôle was as congenial and irresponsible as Sissy's, with an air of importance that roused envy in her mates' hearts.

The very pretense rallied her, excited her, inspired her to continue to pretend after she had left her audience behind her. And though she entered the lower class-room, of which she was to have charge for a day, with a terrified feeling of being thrown to the lions, she faced the undisciplined mob that licked its lips in anticipation of a feast on raw young substitute with a flash in her eye that promised battle first.

And she did make a hit at the beginning, thanks to her sister and present pupil, Bessie, who was invariably late to school.

To Bep, the aspect of her own sister in a position of authority was the hugest absurdity, and when the blonde twin sauntered in, tardy, as usual, she joined the class as one of the lions. She intended to give Kate distinctly

to understand that she was mixed primary pupil first and a Madigan afterward; that the substitute might expect no mercy from her on the pitiful plea of relationship.

Bep's attitude was very Madigan; the only drawback to it was that it left out of the reckoning the fact that she had a Madigan to deal with.

"Elizabeth Madigan," said the substitute, in the clear, high, formal tone that, in itself, was sufficient to sever all bonds of kinship, "where is your excuse for being late?"

Bep's blue eyes blinked. The impudence of Kate to talk that way to her!

"I ain't got any. Miss Walker never—"

"Miss Walker is n't teaching to-day," remarked the substitute, in the patient tone which the enlightened have for dullness. "She is ill and I am teacher here. Where is your excuse?"

Bep felt the silence grow around her. She saw the whole school drop its mirth and its employments to watch this duel between Madigans.

"Why, you know very well, Kate Madigan—" she began hotly.

A sharp ring on the bell at the teacher's desk cut Bep's eloquence short. " If you have anything to say to me, little girl, you will address me as Miss Madigan."

The audacity of it struck Bep dumb. Call that slim girl Miss Madigan? She 'd like to see herself!

"You will go home, Elizabeth," the substitute continued, unconcernedly making her way to the blackboard as though this life-and-death affair were a mere incident in her many duties, "and bring me back a written excuse for your tardiness."

Bep set her teeth. "You know I had to go an errand for Aunt Anne; you saw me yourself," she muttered.

"A *written* excuse, I said."

"I can't get any." Yet Bep rose. She felt the ground slipping from under her.

"Then I am sorry to say," remarked the substitute, firmly, "that I shall not be able to have you in my class to-day. Leave the room, Bessie. . . . Now, children, the first thing to do in subtraction—"

Bessie walked slowly up the aisle and toward the door. With the prospect of a double disciplining, at home and at school, too, she dared not rebel. Yet wrath smoldered within her. She came to where the substitute stood at the board, calmly explaining the process of "borrowing," and the resolution to regard her as an undeserving stranger was tempered by

Bep's desire to inflict an intimate, personal insult.

"I would n't be so afflicted as you," she growled under her breath, like a small Mrs. Partington, misapplying her big word in her wrath, "for all the world. And I 'll get even!"

A gleam of quite unofficial laughter lit the substitute's eye. "You mean 'affected,' my little girl, not 'afflicted,' " she said clearly, pausing pedagogically, chalk in hand. "Look up the difference in your dictionary, and if you can't understand, come to me and I 'll explain it to you—after you bring your excuse."

And Bep brought her excuse. The substitute, her cheeks glowing with excitement, yet calm-voiced and pretending valiantly, saw the door open nearly an hour later, and a hand thrust through waving an envelop, as though it were a lightning-rod that might attract the storm of her wrath away from the one who carried it.

Gravely, even encouragingly, Miss Kate Madigan read a prayer from Miss Anne Madigan that the teacher would kindly excuse the tardiness of Elizabeth, her niece. She placed it on file religiously, like a confirmed devotee to red tape, and resumed her lesson to the baby

class, with a matter-of-course air that completed the routing of Bep.

But there was still another relative in the mixed primary—Frances. For half a day the smallest of Madigans was supposed to be doing kindergarten work, with a mild infusion of the practical in the shape of a-b-c's.

It did not occur to this young lady to try to disown the substitute. On the contrary, she was exceedingly proud of her proprietary interest in the teacher. She leaned her plump hand upon that august person's knee in all the easy charm of intimacy when the baby class gathered about her, and was so intoxicated by reflected glory that she forgot the two letters of the alphabet she was supposed to know.

There was one thing no Madigan—not even Kate—could pretend to: to be patient was beyond them all, talented as they were.

"It 's 'B,' Frank!" the substitute cried, in her exasperation forgetting the dignified demeanor she had adopted. "Say 'B,' 'B,' you stupid!"

In that terrible moment Frank realized that there were drawbacks to being too well acquainted with the teacher. Her eyes filled with tears of chagrin. " 'B, B, you stupid!' " she sobbed.

And a quick, clear laugh from the substitute completed the demoralization of the mixed primary. It was not, strictly speaking, "in order" when Mr. Garvan visited it.

Oh, to be out of school, at the end of that first day of adulthood! To be unwatched, to be free, to be little and young, if that pleased one! To walk up the hill and along the main street, and then, just as one was about to turn the corner prosaically and mount still higher—then to come face to face with a creature so elegant, so visibly "dressed," that no gambler in town could outshine him. By sheer good luck, to have been introduced to this dandy in one's capacity of teacher of the mixed primary that very morning, when he had been given permission by Mr. Garvan to make an announcement at the school concerning special privileges granted school-children at the "high-class minstrel performance" given at Lally's Opera House. To be unhampered now by the timidities of office, and ready to pick up the gage of coquetry his saucy glance threw down. And so, after the smallest second's hesitation,—the woman in one stifling both the child's and the substitute's hesitation,—to allow the gaudy stranger to walk beside one the length of C

Street. And though the sidewalk was crowded, for stocks were up, and one had to wriggle one's way through the people packed tight in front of the brokers' offices, yet, in the very teeth of the townsfolk, to joy shamelessly in flirtation with this gorgeous, shining, flattering stranger —a social outlaw, as well as a bird of passage, the very disrepute of whose profession made temptation more subtly sweet!

"Split," whispered Sissy, her voice muffled with shame,—it was a week later,—"Kate walked with a minstrel! What shall we do?"

"Did she? Who told on her—Mrs. Ramrod? Well," added Split, out of the depths of experience, "it must have been that day she substituted."

OLD MOTHER GIBSON

OLD MOTHER GIBSON

IMPRISONED in skirts, Jack Cody was awaiting his mother and relief, when there came a knock at the door, and a voice distinctly not Jane Cody's said:

"I beg your pardon, I 'm sure, but your town 's so jolly dark, I believe I 've lost my way. I 'm looking for— My word, what 's that!"

A parabola of light had suddenly shot out athwart the soft black night. It seemed to come from the hill to the left, and it was accompanied by the tinkle of shattered glass.

"It 's the Madigans." Jack's voice was wistful and his gaze was turned longingly upward.

"Madigans!" exclaimed the stranger, looking in amazement from the boyish face surmounting a shapeless woman's gown to the thing it watched so yearningly—a light flaring brightly on the hill, a lot of small dancing figures silhouetted blackly against it, the smell of coal-oil, and the shrill excited laughter of children.

"Upon my soul, yours is a strange country," the man went on—"stranger even than it looks. How in the world did you know that I was looking for the Madigans?"

"Are you?" asked the boy, dully. His body might be down in Jane Cody's cabin, but his soul was up aloft there where the Madigans held high carnival.

"Yes, I am," answered the stranger, his eyes fixed upon the odd figure before him.

"Well, there they are," the boy said, pointing upward to the grotesque dancing shadows.

"Eh?—I beg your pardon, I—I don't understand. Just what has happened?" asked the stranger.

"Nothin'," said Jack. "The lamp gets tipped over when they 're playing Old Mother Gibson, and they just throw it out so 's not to set the house afire."

"Every night?" asked the man, in the polite tone strangers adopt in striving to fathom a local mystery.

"Nope," said the boy, in a matter-of-fact tone. "They can't play it every night; sometimes their aunt won't let 'em."

"You appear to know them." There was a smile hidden beneath the voice; but Jack was thinking, not of the questioner, indistinguish-

able in the darkness, but of the mad carnival up yonder on the hill.

"Yep. That 's Split," he said. "That one —see—with the bushy lot of hair, singing and cake-walking in front. She can do a cake-walk better 'n any nigger I ever see."

"Indeed!"

"That 's Frank, the baby—the one that 's screamin' so. You can tell her squeals; they 're laughin' ones, you know."

" I suppose I ought to know. Anyway, I 'm glad to be told."

"Over on the side there, where there 's a kind of blotch, is the twins; they must be fighting. Don, the dog, 's mixed up in it somehow."

"My word!" exclaimed the man, softly, to himself.

"That 's Kate dancing round on the porch, and the one standing high-like, right next to the fire, with her arms up stiff, as if she was running the whole show, sort of—of—"

"A priestess, say, invocating the Goddess of Kerosene!"

"Huh?—Well, that 's Sissy."

"Oh, is it? Tell me—is she nice—Sissy?"

"What?" asked the boy, so surprised that he withdrew his attention from on high and stared out at the man on the door-step.

There came a laugh out of the darkness. "It is an odd question, but then everything is so odd out here, I half hoped you would n't notice it. But you do know them, evidently. I wonder—do you mind going up there with me and showing me the way?"

But his last question had suddenly recalled to Jack Cody the reason why he was n't at that moment one of the dancing black figures on the hill. The boy looked from his mother's wrapper to the man's face, growing more distinct now, out on the door-step, and the amused expression he saw there his sore egotism attributed to a personal cause. So he promptly slammed the door in the man's face.

There was an instant's pause out in the blackness, made denser now that the candle's light from the cabin was cut off; then a short, nonplussed laugh.

"Miles, old chap," the young man was saying to himself, as he turned cautiously to jump from the stoop and mount the hill, "this is Bedlam you 've fallen into—this mad little mining-town ten thousand miles off in a brand-new corner of the world, all hills and characters! Now, what might be the sex of that animal you were talking to? And what in the name of peace are these Madigans? Are they the ones you 're look— Steps, as I value my im-

mortal soul!'' he exclaimed, rubbing his shin where he had struck against the wandering Madigan stairway. ''It would not have surprised me, now, if I had had to climb that hill on my hands and knees, and stand on my head when I got to the door, to knock at it with my heels!''

Miss Madigan's demeanor was beautiful to see. Just a bit—oh, the least bit of I-told-you-so in her manner, but also a generous willingness to postpone the acceptance of apologies due to one long misunderstood, and to take for granted the family's obligation.

''The estate must be worth at least ten thousand a year,'' she confided in her delighted perturbation to Frances, as she curled her hair. And Frank looked up at her, soulful and uncomprehending, and a bit cross-eyed, for the curl dangling down over her nose. ''He 'll marry Kate, of course—I had no idea he was so young. He 'll just be the savior of the whole family. It 's a providence,—Miles Madigan's dying when he did,—and was n't it fortunate that Nora sent my letter back? . . . You will be good at the table, Frances, and show cousin Miles how nicely you can use your fork? . . . He is practically a cousin. . . . Have you washed your hands?''

"Hm-mm," murmured Frank, mendaciously. And then, as Aunt Anne appeared to doubt her word, "Just you ask God if I have n't," she suggested solemnly, carefully putting her hands behind her.

But Miss Madigan had no time to put questions to so distant an authority. She had Wong to placate—Wong with his wash-day face on, grim, ill-tempered, hurried, defying the world to put even the smallest additional burden on his shoulders on Monday. And Miles Morgan just arrived from Ireland!

And Francis talking to him in the library, in that distant, watchful, uncompromising way of his, that was just as likely as not to send the young man off in a huff.

"One need n't insult a man just because he 's rich and a relative!" Miss Madigan's exclamation was uttered aloud unconsciously, so excited was she. It ended with a gasp, as Sissy collided with her on the way from peeking through the half-open library door at her father and his guest.

It was the bedroom, Kate's and Irene's, that Sissy was bound for; for there, in solemn conclave, the junior Madigans were assembled, waiting for their scout's report.

"He 's big—but not so big as the Avalanche,"

she began the moment she had shut the door behind her and faced the questioning eyes that commanded her to stand and deliver. "He 's straight, too, but not so poker-stiff as Mrs. Ramrod. He 's got a big haw-haw voice, and scrubs every word he says with a tooth-brush before he says it. His hands are as white—as white; and they 're cleaner than Crosby Pemberton's. He 's got a tan shirt on, plaited in front, and every time Aunt Anne moves he 's up like a jumping-jack till she gets sat down again. He says 'My word!' and 'in the States' —like that. He 's got a mustache the color of your hair, Split, a scrubby, stiffy little mustache. His eyes are little twinkling things, and I believe—" she paused in her indictment to give the criminal the benefit of the doubt—"I do believe he had gloves on when he first came! I won't be sure; but, anyway, I hate him."

A gratified sigh rose from the Madigans assembled. It was good to have definite information, to know that this Miles Morgan was hatable. For the Madigans loved to hate any one who could put them under obligations—when they did not spend their very souls in a passion of gratitude to him. But for this interloping, distant relative from foreign shores they were prepared. They were ready to outrage him,

to throw his patronage in his teeth, if he dared offer it, to out-Madigan the Madigans, if that were necessary; to disgust him and satisfy their pride, wounded by the insolence of his prosperity. Yes, it was good to hear Sissy's frank declaration of war. For war was as the breath of the Madigans' nostrils. They knew themselves there, and, though they might have trusted Sissy, they had feared for a moment that her report might not be all they had hoped.

"We 'll show him," said Split.

"A patronizing, affected Irishman!" snorted Sissy, informally now that her official duties were ended.

"He thinks he 'll come out here and run the whole family," said Fom, aggrieved.

"And show off how rich he is, and turn up his nose at things," said Bep, "and boss us. I 'd like to see him try it!"

"And be shocked at what we don't know, and what we do do, and what we have n't seen and learned. I dare him just to say 'abroad' to me!" cried Kate, with a flash in her eye.

A chorus of groans went up from the indignant assemblage.

"Aunt Anne," put in Frank, a bit puzzled, "says he 's the savior of the fam'ly. What 's a—"

"The savior of the family! The savior!" mocked Sissy, genuflecting sarcastically. "The savior of the family will have you sent to a convent, Split, 'where young ladies are taught to behave properly.' The savior 'll get a nursemaid for you, Frank, and you 'll have to go about always holding her hand and wearing socks in the English style that 'll show your bare, naked legs and—"

"I won't! I won't!" Tears of terror stood in Frank's eyes.

"The savior 'll put a stop, Fom, to your—Kate Madigan, are you changing your dress?" Sissy's voice fell suddenly, and she put the question in a calm, magisterial tone that sent every eye in the room on a query toward the eldest Madigan.

Kate turned at bay. She had slipped off her waist, and the red was flushing her long throat and small, spirited face. "Well, miss, suppose I am?" she demanded hotly.

"She always changes her dress for dinner, you know," came in a sarcastic sneer from Split. "She wants to show our dear cousin how swell we are. We all wear low-necked rigs, and father has his swallowtail, and—"

"Shall I bring you the curling-iron, Kathy?" mocked Sissy.

"Don't you want a rose for your hair, Kathleen?"

"Or a ribbon here and there, as Mrs. Ramrod says, Kitty?"

"Aunt Anne says," said Frank, feeling that this was some sort of game and that her turn had come, "he 's going to mawwy you. Is he, Kate?"

The white cashmere with the red-embroidered rosebuds slipped from Kate's hand. All innocent of malicious intent, Frank's shot had scored. The cry of the Pack that leaped about her could not touch Kate after this. She was frozen in by maidenly prudery, by childish self-consciousness, by Madigan perversity. When the bell rang she went in to dinner in her old pink gingham, her head high, her lips set, her eyes unseeing.

"She 's got 'em," Sissy whispered to Split.

"Yep, that 's the sulks all right," Split nodded.

"This is Kate." Miss Madigan, brave in her new purple gown with the lace collar at her throat, shot a reproachful glance at the unadorned young lady of the house. "Your cousin, Miles Morgan, Kate."

"How d' ye do?" Kate said coldly, ignoring his outstretched hand and passing on to her seat, where she began busily to serve the butter.

The savior of the family looked after her, interested. Though guilty of every count in Sissy's indictment, he was not accustomed to being overlooked by such very young ladies.

"And this is Irene," said Miss Madigan, a tremor in her voice; she, too, knew now that Kate "had 'em." "This one is Cecilia; the twins, Bessie and Florence; and Frances, the baby."

The savior of the family glanced along the line of five blank faces, and felt the perfunctory touch of five small, slippery hands with nothing more human about their clasp than the childish masks above them.

"I say, how do you tell one another apart?" he asked, with a sudden gleam in his eye, as they passed him and slid into their places.

A dozen pitying eyes looked coldly at him; half a dozen small mouths curved disdainfully. His remark seemed to make them more than ever like mechanisms—hostile ones.

Miss Madigan dropped the soup-ladle in her confusion. To that experienced lady there was something ominous about so unbroken a union of Madigans; she remembered with sorrow the few times any subject had found them unanimous.

But Madigan came in just then, took his seat at the head, looked mechanically for the ban-

ished dog and the cat, and Dusie, chirping madly in her cage to attract his attention to the fact of her cruel and unusual imprisonment. He cleared his throat and took up the carver—and immediately Miles Morgan was conscious of an unbending of the small Madigans—a cuddling together, so to speak, and a swift interchange of impressions.

"You have n't given me an opportunity to explain, Miss Madigan—" he began, in the pause during which Madigan carved strenuously.

" 'Aunt Anne,' if you please, my dear boy," urged Miss Madigan, warmly. "The relationship 's distant, but now that you are with us we can have no ceremony out here in the wilds."

"Oh, thank you." The savior, turning toward her, saw the fattest little Madigan nudge her red-haired neighbor savagely. She was evidently angry at something. "It 's good of you to take me in like this. What I want to say is that the train was late crawling crookedly up and around the mountains. I had no idea of arriving in the evening and coming in upon you this way. But when I got here, the town looked so savage, don't you know, so—drear—and desolate and—and flimsy, I got a bit homesick—there! The thought of all you people,

my own people, housed somewhere in the spraddling town, called to me. I positively could n't wait till morning. You 'll forgive me—Aunt Anne?''

A suppressed gurgle came from a blonde Madigan on the other side of the table, choking over her soup at this endearment. A brunette just her height spoke rapidly to her and persuasively, but to no avail. Alarming sounds came from the victim till presently a very dignified, small fat person rose from her seat, made her way to the nearly suffocated blonde, gave her a thump between the shoulder-blades that brought tears of another variety to the sufferer's eyes, and walked composedly back to her seat.

''How can you be so rough, Sissy!'' Aunt Anne exclaimed in an agitated voice.

''Ah—Sissy!'' The savior leaned forward, looking across with a smile in his eye that might have melted any heart save so savage a Madigan's. ''So you are Sissy.''

''My name,'' said that young person, meeting his smiling eye coldly, ''is Cecilia.''

''But your friends call you Sissy?''

''Yes, my friends do,'' admitted the perfectionist, with an accent that was supposed to be crushing.

"And you sign yourself so in your letters?" he went on pleasantly.

"My letters?"

"Yes; your informal little notes, you know."

Sissy laid down her spoon. A sudden distaste for eating, for living, for breathing had come upon her. She had forgotten her postscript to that unhappy letter; it was all so long ago, and Aunt Anne's letters never had had a sequel! But before her now the savior's head seemed to bob up and down sickeningly, while a voice cried in her ears so loud she fancied the whole table must hear it:

"You—whoever you are—need n't bother to answer this. None of us Madigans wants your help or annybody else's. It 's only that Aunt Anne 's got the scribbles; and we 'll thank you to mind your own business.

"Sissy Madigan."

The savior threw back his head in a quite boyish way and laughed aloud as he watched her face.

A cold rage seized Sissy. To be laughed at before the whole table! She hated him; she knew she hated him!

"I don't understand," said Madigan, feeling

called upon to say something that was not vituperative at his own dinner-table. "You could never have seen a note of Sissy's, Mr. Morgan?"

"Never." The savior lied like a gentleman.

But he was mistaken if he supposed that he had placated Cecilia. She would not even meet his eyes, those eyes that twinkled so enjoyingly.

The savior tried Irene.

"You and I have hair the same color," he said genially. "I hope your temper is n't like mine, too."

"I hope not," she answered stiffly.

He laughed again, that big, amused laugh. Split's eyes shot fire. Evidently the Madigans were funnier than they knew.

"Now, I wonder," he said, "would that be a compliment or a confession?"

"Irene is trying and succeeding better every day in gaining self-control," interposed Aunt Anne, with hasty amiability. To discuss Irene's temper in committee of the whole, like that—the temerity of the man! "Won't you have some more mutton?" she pressed. "It 's wash-day, you know, and it 's just a pick-up dinner; but we 're so glad to have you, if you 'll excuse—"

"The apology 's due from me, you know,"

he interrupted. "And the good fortune 's mine, too. Fancy me dining the evening of my arrival at that brick barn they call the hotel down yonder! It will be hard enough when I really have to live there."

"You do not surely expect—" began Madigan, pausing over his strawberries.

"To live 'out West'? Will you let me tell you how it happened, Mr. Madigan? There is n't much to it—just this: Miles Madigan, as you know—do you know?—was not the man to leave much behind him. Not that he 'd deliberately wrong a fellow, poor old chap, but—well—oh, you understand! Well, when his solicitors got through subtracting and dividing and subdividing, the heir—one Miles Morgan, bred to do nothing, and with a talent for that profession, I must admit—found himself poor, with just enough to live on. The ten thousand a year had—just slipped through Miles Madigan's fingers."

"Oh!" Miss Madigan's voice was sympathizing, disappointed.

"Then"—it was Frank's clear treble; she had n't understood much, but she knew what "poor" meant: a Madigan learned that early—"then you 're not going to mawwy Kate?"

Kate went white, while Miss Madigan's deli-

cate face flushed purple, and Split pinched Sissy's arm, in her excitement, till that young woman cried aloud.

"Frances—outside!" stormed Madigan.

"Oh, Mr. Madigan—please!" deprecated the savior, holding out his arms to the whimpering Frances, who jumped into them as to a refuge. "No, little girl," he said, bending down to reassure her, "I 'm going to marry Sissy; that 's why I came out here."

A gasp of relief parted Kate's trembling lips. She was very near being fond of the detested savior in that moment, in her gratitude to him for not having looked at her.

But oh, the disdain of Sissy! It was such a very poor joke, in her opinion. Her round little face with its dots for features looked so sour and supercilious, as she passed the savior with averted eyes on her way out of the dining-room,—the children were withdrawing now,—that he could not resist putting out a hand to stop her.

"You will have me, Sissy?" he begged with a laugh. "Think of a man coming clear out here with so little encouragement as I had. Such devotion might appeal to a heart of stone!"

His enemy stood with downcast eyes, the red

slowly mounting to the smoothed-back brown hair.

"Sissy 's Number One in her class," ventured Frank, as a recommendation.

"I 'm not!" flamed forth Sissy. "I never was, or—or if I was it was because of—of—"

"Why, Sissy!" interjected Miss Madigan, grieved.

"Of a mistake of some sort," suggested the savior, soothingly. "Well, I suppose I could marry a girl that was only Number Two."

"I 'm never Number Two—never! I 'm Number—Twenty!" Sissy's eyes were raised for a moment to his—a revelation of the insulted dignity seething within her.

"Oh, well, a Number Twenty wife is good enough; but we 'd have to live in Ireland, I suppose," said the savior, philosophically.

A passion of wrath at his dullness filled the clever Sissy, and she sought for a moment before she found the weapon to hurt him.

"In Ireland, you know," she said, as deliberately as she could for fear of breaking into tears before she had delivered the insult, "the pigs live in the parlor, and—and the children have no place to sleep and—go barefooted!"

"Oh!" The savior was stunned for an instant, but he recovered. "No, I did n't know.

But in Nevada, I 'm told, the Indians eat Irishmen alive, and those that are left are shot down by white desperados on C Street every day just at noon! We could n't live here, could we?''

Sissy gasped. She opened her lips as if to speak, but closed them again, and suddenly, in the instant's pause, there came an irresistible giggle from Split, already out in the hall.

Sissy's hands flew to her breast. She shook off her suitor's detaining hand and bolted.

''I could n't help it,'' the savior said to Madigan, who was looking at him with that perplexed frown which the manifestation of his children's eccentricities so often brought to his face. ''She is delightful. What jolly times we 'll have getting acquainted! How fortunate you are, Mr. Madigan, to have these—''

Madigan threw up his head, a challenge in his eye. Was he even to be congratulated upon his misfortunes?

''I always said,'' the savior went on, with a chuckle,—''in fact, I began to say it before I got into knickerbockers,—that I intended to be the father of a family numbering at least a 'baker's dozzen.' I believe I had a vague notion that by means of superabundance of paternity I could atone to myself for my lack of other

family ties. I was always so beastly alone. Yet no one—Miles Madigan least of all—saw the pathos of my lot. 'He 's young and unencumbered,' he said of me toward the last when he was reminded of how little he had left for me. 'He 'll get along. Besides, there 's that wildcat mine out in the States; I 'm leaving him that.' ''

Madigan's pipe fell to the floor; he had been filling it for his after-dinner smoke. ''You 've got the Tomboy!'' he exclaimed.

''That interests you?'' Morgan asked.

Kate, who picked up the pipe and handed it to her father, as she passed, the last of the line of young Madigans on the way out, saw how Francis Madigan's hand shook. Mechanically she paused and listened.

''I—I was swindled out of my share of that mine,'' he said harshly. ''Miles Madigan knew that in fairness half of it was mine. I found it. I worked for it. I put aside all other opportunities to devote myself to developing it. I sacrificed my children and my business to it. I gave up the best years of my life to it. I bore disappointment and poverty because of it. I was at the end of my tether when Miles Madigan went into it with me; and yet when I saw he was bent on freezing me out of it, I—I— But

after he got it he did n't know what to do with it. He left it to be worked and himself fleeced by strangers. But—it killed my wife, and left me, after all those years of litigation, an embittered, beggared, broken man!''

''And so it 's but fair''—to Kate, shivering at the revelation in her father's voice, Miles Morgan's words seemed like soothing music—''it 's but fair that you and I should handle the thing together—what there is of it, Mr. Madigan,'' he added hastily, as Madigan was about to speak; and he leaned forward, holding out his hand boyishly. ''There may not be much, but I can get English capital to develop it, at a sacrifice of half its value now, and its possibilities. So that will leave only quarter shares for each of us. I may be offering you only a lot of work and a disappointment at the end. But the thing seemed worth enough to me, 'way over on the other side, to come out here and look into it myself. And one thing that made it seem so was the desperate battle you had fought to keep it. I hoped—I hoped you 'd like me well enough, when we got to know each other, to help me with your experience, and—frankly, to help yourself in helping me. I had no intention of saying all this to-night, but—allow me, Cousin Kate.''

He had dropped Madigan's hand after a hearty squeeze, and was standing holding open the door for Kate to pass.

It was a glorified Kate, for, lo, the veil of ill humor had fallen; a treacherous Kate, Sissy would have said, for she shone out now, warm and sparkling, upon the man who had had the discrimination to let a brood of small Madigans pass without special attention, yet who jumped to his feet when the young-lady daughter of the house made her exit, and stood looking after her till Madigan hauled him off to the library to talk about the Tomboy.

That certain contentment which followed after an unusually good dinner, when the world and the Madigans were young together, had inspired Old Mother Gibson. The original couplet, with which all Madigans are familiar, is not strictly quotable; it was not invented, but adopted, by them. And it served merely to give a name to the game, which was half a war-dance, half a cake-walk, accompanied by chanted couplets composed by each performer in turn; said couplets being necessarily original and relevant locally. The accompaniment—an easy change of chords—was played on the piano *colla voce.* And no one minded in the least a

foot, more or less, at the end of a verse. The joke was the thing with the Madigans, and the impromptu rhyme that brought down the house was the one that hit hardest.

For Old Mother Gibson was a satire, a pasquinade, a flesh-and-blood libel done in rhyme, of wildest license both as to form and matter, and set to music—to be discharged full at the head of the victim. It began in an orderly way, every Madigan in her turn playing both parts of victim and cartoonist. But it degenerated into an open and shameless mimicry of Aunt Anne, of Francis Madigan, of the schoolmaster, Mrs. Ramrod, the Misses Blind-Staggers, Professor Trask, Dr. Murchison, Wong, Indian Jim, and, finally, each of the other's tenderest folly—till a living caricature too true or too cutting precipitated an appeal to arms, and the Lighthouse, which was always in the way, was tipped over in the mêlée, and had to be thrown out of the window, there to burn itself into darkness innocuously.

Old Mother Gibson was given by a full cast the night of the savior's arrival. Though Jane Cody had been merciless, Jack, tempted beyond his powers of resistance by the sounds of revelry upon the hill, was stalking about in melancholy masquerade among its personnel. Bom-

bey Forrest, her delicate head looking like a surprised sunflower upon its masculine stalk, had come in, and Crosby Pemberton, looking as much out of place in his immaculate linen and small Tuxedo as either of these, was joyous at being among Madigans again.

You might have heard—if you 'd stood out on the piazza looking in, and happened to have the key to the riddle—a hint in verse of every Madigan escapade, of every Madigan failing, of all the Madigan jokes, on Old Mother Gibson nights. You would have seen even Kate—young-lady Kate, who had once substituted in a school—join in this mad revel, with an appetite for fun that showed how much of a child she still was.

An impressionable young Irishman, who had come out upon the piazza to smoke a cigar and think himself back into his usual poise after a day full of new experiences, had his attention attracted by the strumming on the piano; and glancing in through the open window, he saw a slender, graceful girl, her dark head rising lightly from the sailor collar of a pink gingham blouse. She was balancing lightly as she walked, keeping time to the rhythm, and followed by a procession of children in single file. (A belief in the efficacy of motion to stimulate

one's power of improvisation made Old Mother Gibson the liveliest of games.) And arriving at the center of the stage, she delivered herself in a singsong of the following:

"Old Mother Gibson, be on your best behavior,
Or you 'll surely fail to satisfy the savior."

It did n't seem a very funny or apposite ditty to Miles Morgan, but, to judge by its effect upon those within, it was exquisitely witty. The whole company doubled up with laughter. It giggled till its collective sides must have ached; then it slowly and gaspingly subsided. When it had quieted down, the piano began again, and a red-headed Madigan, intoxicated by the music, the license of the time, and the excitement accompanying creative work, danced a fantastic *pas seul,* as she flew about in the Mother Gibson merry-go-round.

"Old Mother Gibson's savior was a dandy—
He thought he 'd buy the Madigans with a stick
of candy!"

sang Split, and the parlor yelled itself hoarse with uproarious delight.

The fat little girl at the piano began to play,

and stopped several times, that she might wipe the tears of laughter from her eyes and get her breath. At last, with a squaring of her shoulders and a stiffening of backbone that seemed queerly familiar to Morgan, watching outside, she half drawled, half sang, with an unmistakable accent:

> "Old Mother Gibson was angry at the Fates;
> My word! They sent the savior 'way out to the States!"

A sudden enlightenment came to Miles Morgan. For a moment the red flamed up in his cheek, and if Split could have seen his face she might have fancied that some imp had caught her likeness, when her temper had got beyond her control, and set it on this man's body.

"The impudent little beggars!" Morgan cried furiously. "My word!" He stopped, remembering the use to which his favorite exclamation had been put. "But what a saucy lot!" He was laughing before he had finished wording his thought.

He was interested now, and listened with a grin to Fom's declaration that

"Old Mother Gibson ought to 've known better
Then to come in answer to Aunt Anne's letter."

He saw even Frank strutting in the ring, though she was capable only of a repetition of the classic phrase with which each couplet began. And he laughed with the rest at Bep,—poor, unready Bep, set as by a musical time-lock and bound to go off,—getting slower and slower in motion as well as utterance, the accompaniment retarding sympathetically as the critical moment approached when she must be delivered of her rhyme.

"Old Mother Gibson, why do you—"

she began her singsong. "No, no! Wait. I know another. 'T ain't fair," she stammered in a prose parenthesis.

"Old Mother Gibson had a—

"Stop laughing, now; wait a minute. You don't give me a chance, Sissy. You play faster for me than for anybody else! You do it a-purpose, too, just 'cause you know it 's easy to bluster me.

"Old Moth-er—Gib-son—"

Bep stopped suddenly, for through the glass doors came the subject of her lay. He had a finger to his lips as he glanced at Sissy's back—a hint that the rest of the company seized delightedly. And when the music began again, he was not ashamed to make this contribution:

"Old Mother Gibson, take pity on a cousin
Left to the tender mercies of the other half-dozen!"

At first the accompanist, accustomed to the rodomontade of voice as well as gesture of the excited performers, was not aware of the interloper. When she finally spun around and saw the savior singing in the midst of his libelers, she let him finish the couplet unaccompanied, and sat, a fat, shocked statue glued to the piano-stool, staring at him.

It was absurd of him, but there was something in Old Mother Gibson, as the Madigans sang and played her, that turned the soberest of heads. And the savior's forte was not in being staid. He fell upon his knee before her.

"Forgive me, O Sissy, for not being a Madigan," he begged, "and receive me into the fold!"

She looked down at him, self-conscious, embarrassed; yet the hidden sentimentality of her nature was appealed to by the masculine young face turned half laughing, half seriously, to her.

"Are you sure," she asked shyly, "that you 're not one already?"

It is of record that one evening during that summer when the old Tomboy mine was reopened, a young Irishman newly arrived on the Comstock escorted down to Fitzmeier's—where, everybody knows, there is ice-cream to be had—six girls of assorted ages, one boy, and two young persons whose garments belied their sex. Yet they all seemed rampantly happy and quite unashamed.

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